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MICHELANGELO

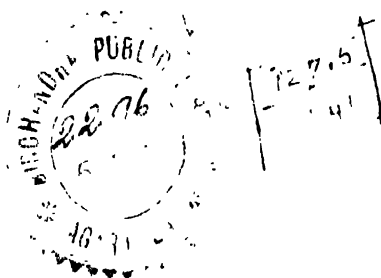
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MICHEL- ANGELO

by Michele Saponaro

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN

by C J RICHARDS



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BOOK I

CHAPTER I: IN A STONE-CUTTER'S HUT

*CHAPTER II: FROM APPRENTICESHIP TO
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CHAPTER I



THE BEGINNING of the life of the greatest portrayer of Biblical characters conjures up a picture from the New Testament: the family of a middle-aged artisan and his young wife fleeing from Palestine into Egypt to save their small predestined son from the persecutions of King Herod.

In the year of our Lord 1475, a man well past his prime took his little family back to his native Florence from Caprese, a village set in the foothills of the sacred Mount Verna. He led a mule by the halter and dragged a small child behind him by the hand. On the mule rode a woman, delicate and considerably younger than her husband, who held one baby in her arms and carried another in her womb. It was the family of Lodovico Buonarotti Simoni, descendants of the Dukes of Canossa.

They settled in Florence, where Lodovico owned a little house. The second son, Michelangelo, whom the mother held in her arms, was given to a wet-nurse in Settignano, where Lodovico had a small farm.

He had no source of income except the modest revenues from the two small estates. The family lived poorly, for Lodovico knew nothing about business and he was too proud of the noble origins of the family to accept public employment. The mother gave birth to a third child two years after the second one, and then to a fourth, all boys, and then she died. Some time after, Lodovico took another wife, who also died young.

Michelangelo, who had been given to a wet-nurse in Settignano, was now motherless and came to know his father only later in life. The wet-nurse was a good woman, wife of a stonemason who spent his days among his stones. Young Buonarotti, lacking the companionship of boys his own age, grew up in the noble company of trees—murmuring olives and silent black cypresses that gradually fell away to the foot of a pleasant hill sparsely

covered with houses and down to the river gleaming in the sun. There were also the handsome peasant girls who bloomed in Settignano like masses of tawny lilies, but they were hardly company for the boy. Michelangelo was not a comely child, but he had grown strong in the healthy outdoor life and he had the muscles and build of an athlete, vigorous and well proportioned as a young oak. He was a rather sullen and taciturn boy and, in the company of others, often quarrelsome. In the boundless solitude, his thoughts envisioned a vast world peopled with giants.

He developed a taste for following the stonecutter and helping him in his rough hard work, which he thought heroic and noble. His childhood unfolded among those Infants and Madonnas chiseled with such artless grace which, in the land of Desiderio, sprang into being as though spontaneously and assumed wonderful aspects in his imagination. He took up the tools of the stonecutter, and he too hewed, chiseled, sculptured those stones. And, most often, when no one could see him, he drew on pieces of paper or on walls what he saw or imagined.

* * *

At the age of ten or twelve Michelangelo returned to Florence. He found a family he did not know and which remained strange to him: the forty-year-old father, three brothers, one of whom was slightly older than he, and two younger ones, a mother who was not his mother, and all in all an atmosphere of bustle, intrigue, disharmony, and distrust that was least calculated to attract him. He always loved his brothers because it was his duty to do so, but he felt that they had nothing in common. He looked for companions outside the home but found few: his ready and stinging wit kept them at a distance. The solitary child grew up into rebellious youth. Then in a young painter and sculptor, Francesco Granacci, six or seven years his senior, he found a friend.

Granacci, who was already working for the Medici, took him around through the Via Larga toward the Medici gardens of San Marco, among the beautiful shops that displayed the mas-

ter painters and the remains of the old statues being excavated in Greece and Rome. When his companion went to work and could not take him along, Michelangelo lingered in the Piazza del Duomo, admiring the bold sweep of the great cupola, or closely studying the doors of the baptistery and the statues placed in the niches of the campanile. The sight of the great palaces, with their serene, spacious, harmonious lines, awed and delighted him. Granacci also took him into churches to see the work of the great artists whom he admired and praised—Filipepi, known as Botticelli, Lorenzo di Credi, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Filippino Lippi, Vannucci of Perugia, the Pollaiuolos.

Lodovico was irritated by his son's apparent shiftlessness. The boy would have to learn what he himself had never learned, a business that would bring the family money. Business—a weaver's shop, or some other enterprise, built on solid ground—was the fountainhead of every well-to-do Florentine family. He sent his son to the school of Francesco da Urbino, who was to teach him grammar and sums, but the young Buonarrotti proved to be a poor pupil. And Lodovico was not an understanding parent; his annoyance with his son's behavior grew in proportion to the latter's aversion to school, so that finally he used the rod on his tiant and rebellious son. Neither time nor affection ever dispelled the lack of understanding and bitterness that fell between them.

One day, persuaded perhaps by Granacci though certainly not convinced that the experiment would succeed, Lodovico took his son from Francesco da Urbino's school and put him in Ghirlandaio's shop. This, in his opinion, was a patent degradation. He comforted himself with the thought that it not only cost him nothing but actually paid him something. The master painter signed a three-year contract, agreeing to pay his pupil a wage of twenty-four florins, six for the first year, eight for the second, and ten for the third. Even while learning, the boy was beginning to earn a living.

The shop of the brothers Domenico and David Ghirlandaio, together with that of the Pollaiuolos, was the most famous

and productive of the time, just as twenty years earlier Verrocchio's shop had flourished. Out of those nurseries came the best artists. The new pupil of that famous school was not precisely a diligent and attentive one, any more than he had been diligent and attentive in his former school. His teacher had no cause to congratulate or to blame himself on his pupil's account. He did not single him out as a budding genius, a child destined for glory, from among the ten or twenty other pupils who surrounded him. Perhaps he was annoyed by the boy's captious and sulky ways, his aloofness, which he thought veiled a great haughtiness, by the sharp looks that flashed as though inadvertently from the sad and changeable deep-set eyes which seemed to follow his every move and thought while he gave out orders and directions from the top of his platform. Ghirlandaio was at that time working on the great frescoes of Santa Maria Novella and Santa Trinità, peopling them with well-known figures of Florentine society, prominent among whom was Giovanna de' Benci, said to be the most beautiful woman in Florence.

The young Buonarroti spent little time in mixing colors and a great deal in secretly drawing on all the paper he could put his hands upon. He often left Ghirlandaio's shop, just as he had left Francesco da Urbino's school, to ensconce himself in the church of the Carmine and there enjoy in peace Masaccio's frescoes, in which he found more to study than in those of his teacher and master. He continued to draw, and drawing, was happy; but in his happiness there were disillusionment and dissatisfaction. He would have been completely content had he had stone as well as paper, chisel and mallet as well as brushes, pen, and charcoal, to handle. He felt growing inside him a disposition to struggle—not to contemplate.

His companions, however, saw his drawings and were astonished by them. Some of them caught a glimpse of what escaped their master, and they spread stories that may be true. They said that he had drawn and colored a head which had been given him to copy, and that he did it so skillfully that the master could not distinguish the copy from the original. It was said also

that with an incredible sureness of touch he made a sketch of the teacher while the latter was working on the platform in the midst of his pupils, who were disposed in various attitudes around him. According to another story, one day a nude drawn by the master fell into his hands and, with a few strokes of the pen, he corrected some of the lines, giving it such perfection that all who saw it were filled with wonder, even its author, to whom it was shown years later, when he had become an old man. Wanting to copy a print of a German painting which represented St. Anthony tormented by devils, he visited a fish market in search of the strangest fish he could find in order to reproduce their fins, tails, and colors in the devils that tormented the saint.

The corrected nude and the deceptive copy of the head surprised but did not please Ghirlandaio. Masters like to be followed, not to be corrected and hoodwinked. But in almost every atelier one of the pupils excels the teacher. Verrocchio too had had the disappointment of seeing Leonardo surpass him, and Perugino was soon to find a fledgling who would push him from his nest. But it is preferable to have this happen outside one's own shop. It made no difference to Ghirlandaio if Michelangelo left him, and Michelangelo left.

Francesco Granacci had become truly fond of Michelangelo, and all of the latter's needs for affection were fulfilled by his only friend. Despite his six or seven years' seniority Granacci, who had treated him as an equal, now looked upon him with awe. A handsome youth, bold, but blessed with a gentle disposition, he was a favorite of Lorenzo de' Medici, who commissioned him to make decorations for feasts and pageants. He often went to the gardens of San Marco and one day took his young friend with him.

These gardens had been an idea of Donatello's. The restless sculptor and archaeologist had once gone to Rome with his friend Brunellesco in search of ancient beauty. Pilgrims in quest of the ideal, the two friends had explored that world of monuments and ruins that Humanism was bringing back to light.

When he returned to Florence, Donatello had suggested to Cosimo that he collect ancient statues, and he himself restored many. Cosimo's son Piero, then his nephew Lorenzo, continued the work, and the gardens of San Marco became both a museum and a school for students of sculpture. Donatello, poor and generous throughout his life and lavish with his work and teaching, entrusted the school and museum to his disciple Bertoldo, who was not a great artist but who became a great teacher.

Here the young Buonarrotti found himself reborn. Among the capitals of truncated columns, masks, exquisite heads, perfect torsos—this was a world in which he could move about and see, touch, study, and enjoy in perfect bliss. All those stones, chiseled or amorphous, blocks or splinters, had a hidden soul that seemed to retreat, as though jealous and offended, before the inquisitive approach of man, but he could have unveiled it with his love, or drawn it out by force.

Young men came to the gardens of San Marco to study and amuse themselves, restorers, sketchers, and copyists worked, and young girls sang the songs of the new spring. The aged Bertoldo could not prevent joy and youth from penetrating into the austere temple of his antiquities. Only the boy introduced by Granacci remained apart, shy, withdrawn, frowning. He had asked for chisel and mallet, and Bertoldo could hear him at work from afar.

Lorenzo the Magnificent often came to keep an eye on the restorers and pupils. He liked to dispense gracious praise and affectionate advice; indeed, he liked to feel himself revered and fawned upon. One day he found the boy, whom he did not know, working on the head of a faun. It was, he thought, a beautiful head, and he was impressed by the striking expression the boy had given it. He made much of the artist, praised and encouraged him, and then, jokingly, told him that he had been very clever in modeling an old faun with such realism, but why had he left him all his teeth? The old, even old fauns, had usually lost some. The story adds that Lorenzo was amazed when, on the following day, he saw with what skill a cavity had been made in

the jaw of the old faun. According to the story, he sensed the genius of the small artist, as no one else had been able to, and he thought of taking him to the palace to follow his progress personally.

Lodovico, when he was asked for his consent to this arrangement, was, or pretended to be, deeply afflicted. His quarrelsome son, he wailed, was lost to the world of business. But it was politic to accede to the wishes of the man who was the head of the city. His son was offered a room, a bed, meals in the palace, a handsome black velvet mantle, and five ducats a month pocket money, while he himself was offered a post in the customs. What more could be expected? Lodovico's dreams of the rich wool merchant vanished forever.

Thus Michelangelo Buonarroti entered the Medici Palace one day in the year 1490. He was fifteen years old.

CHAPTER II

IN THE CLOUDY TWILIGHT of the fifteenth century, Florence was the happiest, the most cultivated, the busiest, and, in a sense, the freest city of Italy and of Europe. That fusion of spirit and senses, that accord of innocence and sin that was the Italian Renaissance, had its garden and market place in Florence.

The freedom which in the Florentines was more a deep-rooted sentiment than a habit had started to decline in the last ten years. It went unnoticed, for the joy of living, the eagerness to learn, the activity in the arts and trades, and the race for riches grew in the twilight of waning freedom. If some realized the decline of their civil liberties, they felt compensated by the authority and the power that the city was acquiring in the endless struggles that were taking place within the peninsula.

By a progressive and astute invasion of public affairs, the Medici had succeeded in putting into effect a singular form of government. Though still private citizens and without any legal power, they had made themselves absolute masters of the city.

From their own family palace, or more often from the Villa Careggi, they controlled the palace of the Signoria and issued orders that insidiously and methodically tightened up its ordinances. Something of a tacit bond had been established between them and the citizenry, but it was not a complete accord, for under an exterior of seeming solidarity were concealed the seeds of dissidence. The pleasant mode of life of those bankers who had become masters of diplomacy, the generosity of their spending and dispensing of accumulated riches in works of art and items of luxury, and the simplicity of their habits which could be clothed in pomp without arousing envy except on the part of rival families—which, in fact, increased their popular appeal—created in the minds of the citizens the illusion that their dominion was a spontaneous expression of the need and the will of the people.

The conspiracy of the Pazzis to overthrow the Medici could have put an end to this tacit or seeming accord, speeding the events that matured only later, but it did not succeed. The younger Medici brother, Giuliano, was killed, but Lorenzo, who was the head of the family, escaped and the conspiracy was smothered in execration even more than in blood. Lorenzo accepted the homage of renewed devotion, and the Florentines ordained his tyranny and their servitude. And if he wanted to take revenge upon those who had offended and almost killed him, the Florentines adjudged the revenge licit and accepted as just the despotic acts which were to legalize that revenge. The lordship of the Medici from that moment on appeared legitimate and deserved.

Florence, though governed by a family powerful in all Europe because of its wealth, suddenly found itself on the brink of ruin. The Florentines knew that their masters had lent money to pontiffs and sovereigns but did not realize that the city coffers, by then confused with the private funds of the bank, were being rapidly exhausted. The feasts, pageants, arches of triumph, carnivals, sport and poetry contests, held them in a perpetual state of intoxication. Feeling well protected, the Florentines were

proud to obey a master such as Lorenzo, who, adding his personal prestige to the standing that his family already enjoyed among the other princes and magnates of the time, had effected a temporary accord between the north and the south and had thus become the counterbalance, the arbiter of Italy.

Habit lulled the people to a lazy unconcern that bred an aversion to changes and upheavals and ended by attributing to the head of the State a right he had never had. Lorenzo, taking advantage of the high degree of artistic and civic education of the Florentine people, at this time increased his political influence over Milan, Venice, and Naples. The innate though dormant democratic sentiments of the Florentines hid his perfect absolutism until the corrosive spirit of Fra Savonarola disrupted that tacit and apparently free accord.

It was natural, in such an atmosphere of joy and pride, of business activity, festive amusement, free spending, and free enjoyment, that genius should flower and fantasies hold sway. The population was not all of noble birth, for it was made up of bankers, notaries, wool merchants, shoemakers, leather merchants, and they produced families of artists and artisans. The native roughness of the people within the ancient walls of the city had been softened by an intense culture which was primarily philosophic and philologic, and art in a multiplicity of forms flourished.

Artists bloomed like the flowers in spring. Every boy who entered a shop as pupil or apprentice became a master within a few years. Ghiberti had won the contest for the doors of San Giovanni, but those portals would have been equally sublime had they come from the hands of either Donatello or Brunellesco who had lost in that contest. Masaccio, before he died still a young man, added to the great heritage. The Sangallos, the Pollaiuolos, the Sansovinos, founded entire families who became eminent in every branch of art. And art and society were so inextricably mingled that society was prolonging its life in art. Taking leave of each other in a public square, or in a church or shop, or a place of amusement, Florentines, men and women

alike, found themselves adorning frescoes. What Ghirlandaio was doing in the choir of Santa Maria Novella, Filippino Lippi had already done in the Brancacci Chapel, Benozzo Gozzoli in almost every one of his paintings. And others, for love or spite, continued to paint portraits of their acquaintances.

* * *

In the hospitable Medici palace a company of elegant and cultivated actors played, in modern costume, a graceful fantasy taken from the ancient world, and the young Buonarrotti, who had not hitherto had the time or the means to see a play as a spectator, was unexpectedly made to take part in it.

Lorenzo had the gift of using his authority simply and affably. He was the master of the house who ruled all his guests unobtrusively. He treated everyone as an equal, surrounding himself with equals who flattered him, persuaded that they were being sincere. In his house, Michelangelo was accepted as an adopted son. He had the same servants, the same meals, the same amusements as Lorenzo's legitimate sons. At table precedence did not exist, and each guest took his place in the order of his arrival and it often happened that the new guest sat next to the Magnificent, before the sons.

The atmosphere of ease and relaxation in which he now lived soothed his troubled spirit, and the serene gaiety of the words to which he listened, of the faces that he saw, brought a feeling of peace to the gifted boy who was by nature melancholy. It took him out of the darkness of gloom, of want and paternal oppression, and set him free from the feeling of humiliation that often saddens the lives of those who are oversensitive. He had time and leisure to work, study, and meditate, for in large houses and vast gardens, time, as well as space, seems limitless. Michelangelo was a guest in the palace of the Magnificent for only two years, but to him, whose life was developing rapidly as though it would soon be spent, those two years counted as ten.

Lorenzo exhorted him to work, but not as teachers and mas-

ters do. He wanted to see his protégé's drawings, to enjoy them, and made suggestions to which the young artist appeared to listen, sketching away meanwhile with a restlessness that betrayed a yearning for other fields. He urged the boy to express his thoughts and succeeded in drawing him out. When conversation in the great halls became general, the youthful guest preferred listening to others. By now he had learned that, besides art, there were poetry and philosophy. The pupil who had been so resistant to learning under Francesco da Urbino discovered the joy that came from the company of such learned men as Angelo Poliziano, Pico della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino. He did not abandon the chisel, but he moved about with a new pleasure among the books and precious manuscripts of the large library. He read a great deal of Dante, Petrarch, Plato. He learned the *Divine Comedy* almost by heart. And when Platonic disputes or poetic battles flared up among the savants, the boy would willingly have taken part in the discussion.

But he expressed himself best outside the palace, under the loges and portals where the young artists liked to assemble. There indeed he gave free rein to his caustic and mocking tongue. A rebel and a ringleader, he injected into an argument a corrosive and destructive spirit, setting pitfalls in discussions of art, inciting rivalry, humiliating companions and competitors alike.

Among the literary lights of the Medici house he liked Poliziano best. One day Poliziano suggested that he interpret in marble an ancient myth: the Battle of the Centaurs and Lapithae. It was not an easy subject, but Michelangelo made his drawings for it. He then asked for a slab of marble and carved a bas-relief so excellent that the poets, philosophers, and artists of the Medici house were astounded by it. The dramatic dash and vigor of that tangle of muscles was unequaled in the sculpture of the time. This boy was beginning not as an imitator but as a creator. Before this he had sculptured a smaller bas-relief of a Madonna suckling her Babe—a Madonna so solemn and severe that, despite her minute proportions, she gives an impression of gran-

deur. Since she is seated on a plinth at the foot of some stairs, she was called the Madonna of the Stairs.

But the joy of the friend of art and of artists was short-lived. Lorenzo was not strong; his life was neither temperate nor ordered. He died on the eighth of April, 1492, when he was only forty-four years old.

The death of the Magnificent deprived not only Michelangelo but every other artist as well of the support of their most understanding friend.

To this sense of loss were added the bitterness and indignation caused by a blow in the face given Michelangelo by Torrigiano, a jealous and uncouth fellow student. The blow had broken Michelangelo's nose; it had irremediably disfigured him, and Torrigiano boasted of it. Michelangelo was not handsome, for the narrow forehead with its two hornlike bumps and its ungainly hairline, the bulge at the back of the skull, the thin lips, and the prominent chin which the first growth of beard made goatlike were not improved by a flattened and crooked nose. There was no remedy—he would always be ugly.

CHAPTER III

☛ THE SPLENDOR of the Italian sky shone on the brightest hour of the day, the hour that precedes the setting of the sun. Black clouds were gathering over the peninsula, and all the horizons flashed warnings of storm.

A young Dominican monk, a native of Ferrara, had preached in Florence a few years earlier, but the Florentines had turned deaf ears to his exhortations, so he had left them and gone to Brescia and Reggio, where he soon became famous. In 1490 he was invited to return to Florence, where he established himself in the convent of San Marco. Lorenzo as patron of all the arts wanted to add to the brilliance of his court the ornament of Christian preaching. Humanism did not deprive the Neoplatonic philosophers and poets of respect for the Church of Rome,

and Lorenzo, lover and author of bawdy songs, had obtained a cardinal's hat for his son Giovanni, a child of twelve, the youngest cardinal in Christendom. The praise that was lavished upon the Magnificent lacked only the blessing that comes from the pulpit, heavy with the incense of the Church. The respect and prestige he had attained might well be increased by the gratitude of a preacher who was becoming famous everywhere in Italy, drawing crowds like an apostle of early times.

Fra Girolamo Savonarola was then thirty-seven years old.

But the praise that rose from the pulpit quickly changed to condemnation of the master of Florence, his family, his court, his taste in art, his customs, his ambitions, and his government. The savage accuser spared no reproof to the man whom the citizenry loved and the poets exalted as the archetype of the Italian people. The deep, shadowy recesses of the church, closed against the noises of the city, resounded to the thin sharp voice which swelled into a veritable peal of thunder, diffusing a spirit of repentance and panic. His fasts, his exhortations, his prophecies, his apocalyptic visions turned the city of song into a city of psalms. The Medicean orgies were transformed into processions of penitence.

Florence then lost its carefree gaiety, its elegant prosperity. A pall of prayer, ecstasies, and flagellations had fallen as from a darkly livid sky upon the workshops and bawdy palaces. The spirit of repentance and terror assumed forms of hallucinations, and when the voice of the prophet was stilled in the churches, lamentations, sobs, and supplications arose. The aura of power and graciousness that surrounded the Medici palace and the palace of the Signoria appeared transformed, in the apocalyptic vision, into a flood of corruption from which the people fled as from a pestilence. The *dies irae* was approaching. The disciples of the flagellating young monk were legion: women, especially, and children trooped in his wake; the women were dressed in white, in the manner of young virgins, and the children, in interminable processions, carried in their hands small red crucifixes and olive branches. Christ was proclaimed King.

At Lorenzo's death the rumor spread among his grief-stricken friends that the monk, called to his Prince's bedside, had refused him absolution because the dying man had not promised him the liberty of Florence. They saw a star set above the Villa Careggi, where the lord lay dying, and they saw the statues of the saints bleed. The clear skies filled with thunder and foreboding. Art was denounced as sin, and treasures of art, poetry, and learning were burned in the squares, as though these pyres would cleanse their authors and readers of every sin. A young painter from Prato, Baccio della Porta, left his shop for a cloister and became Fra Bartolommeo. Botticelli wanted to destroy his charming Hellenic Venuses and Graces and Primavera in order to paint only scenes and figures of penitence. A young friend of Buonarrotti's, Lorenzo di Credi, destroyed many of his canvases. Poliziano and Pico della Mirandola almost went out of their minds and died, shortly afterwards, converts to the Dominican life and frock.

But these were excesses. The reaction was soon to follow. Florence then obtained a greater degree of freedom in its ordinances, and the way was open for the Republic. The citizens moved with greater independence in their everyday life, but spiritually they felt injured and numbed. Apocalyptic prophets are destined to be short-lived; they shackle the people with a spirit of devotion and of abnegation, but terror breaks the chains of submission and arouses rebellion. The most credulous then become the most hostile.

The purification of Florence was only the first lap in Savonarola's crusade of faith and righteousness. The major battle was now declared against the Vatican and against Pope Alexander Borgia. This reform within the Church was aimed at men and their shameful actions. It was only a premonitory symptom of that protest against the Church which, with different weapons and different results, was to burst out a short time later in Germany.

The man who had become the spiritual dictator of Florence and Italy did not answer the summons to Rome, where he was

called to justify himself, repent, and permit himself to be corrupted. He deemed it better to stay far away, out of reach of the poisons and the daggers of the Borgias; but even for those who are far away there is excommunication, and with it the stake. In the fire, lit in the great square of the Signoria, on Ascension Day, 1498, the last banners of the Renaissance were burned. The flames consumed the body of the friar, but in the purified air a great deal of smoke remained.

The Republic of Pier Soderini, which followed the democratic and theocratic domination of Savonarola, was a noble and severe regime which for a little while restored to Florence her ancient heroic character; but civic liberty was a purely internal thing and was worth little when, in Florence and in every other Italian state, foreign tyranny supervened.

After Lorenzo's death young Buonarrotti felt lost in the Medici palace, where he had been surrounded by so much beauty and grace, and his footsteps now echoed hollowly in the deserted and empty rooms. He felt that the masters of the house and the servants no longer looked upon him with the confidence and regard that they had assumed under the protecting eyes of the Magnificent. His sons became strangers to him. Piero, who was the eldest and the heir, so different from his father, pretended not to notice the small artist whose head was so full of ideas and fancies. Giovanni, the Cardinal, was a boy, thick in body and slim in intellect, who wanted only to have a good time. Giuliano alone, who was still a child, looked upon him with admiration. Michelangelo took his leave and returned to his father's small, dark house. It was not a cheerful one, situated as it was among a swarm of other small, dark houses in the old quarter of Santa Croce. The atmosphere of sloth and indifference had become unbearable for an artist. The young man's sensitive and demanding mind, rather than his temperate body, was offended by it. His oldest brother had followed Savonarola and had become a monk; the others were still looking for a path that they could not find. His father was still working in the customs, at the job offered him by Lorenzo, but without zest. Then, one day Piero

summoned him, and he returned to the Medici palace. It had snowed heavily in Florence all during the night of January 22, 1494, and on the following day the snow was piled high and soft above the bases of the columns. Standing at his window looking at the snow, Piero had a sudden desire to see a giant snowman in the center of the courtyard, so he sent for Michelangelo. The eccentric Duke had indeed remembered the young artist who used to sit at table next to him, or even before him, but it was an invitation that hinted of derision. Michelangelo obeyed the summons and modeled a superb snow giant. It was, at any rate, a pastime.

The giant snowman melted in the sun, but the young man remained in the Medici house. It was no longer the sympathetic home of former years, filled with light and grace, but a troubled, forbidding retreat. It seemed as though windows and doors were slammed by the wind, that a constant pounding of mysterious steps ran after each other in far rooms, that mad horses pawed the ground in the courtyard.

Michelangelo at that time made a statue of Hercules, which was about six feet high, a statue conceived after completing, under the guidance of Poliziano, the Centaur bas-relief. A little later he carved a wooden crucifix which was admired as a most ingenious work. The Hercules, acquired by the Strozzi, remained in their palace until the time of the siege; then it was given to Francis I, who used it to enhance the beauty of the garden of the pool at Fontainebleau. It was finally lost. Only sketches remain of the crucifix, Michelangelo's only piece of woodcarving, for it too was lost. The struggle had started between the artist, who accomplished so much, and time, which devoured so much of his work. He carved the crucifix as a token of gratitude to the prior of Santo Spirito, who kept a protective and affectionate eye on the slightly mad and wonderful boy whom he greatly admired. Michelangelo asked him for parts of corpses in order to dissect them, and the good priest supplied them in secret.

One day a friend named Cardiere, who was a mandolin player at court, confided in him that he had had a nightmare. Lorenzo had appeared to him in his sleep, sad, thoughtful, wrapped in a tattered black robe that scarcely covered his almost naked body, and had ordered him to warn Piero that he would soon be expelled from Florence, never to return. While the fearful prophecies of Savonarola thundered from the pulpit, it was not easy to escape from the fear of dreams. Michelangelo suggested that Cardiere tell the Prince of the dream, but the latter did not follow the advice, for he knew it would go hard with him if he did so, and he was afraid of his new master's quick temper and arrogant ways.

Cardiere's dream was soon to come true. In spite of all his tricks, deceptions, and obsequious offers of help to curry favor with Charles VIII, the Medici was unable to hold the Signoria and was forced to flee from Florence to save his life. Michelangelo, who had felt the approaching storm, had already fled. He had asked two friends to accompany him, and together they set out for Venice in quest of adventure.

There flourished at that time in Venice, where Antonello da Messina, on his return from Flanders, had introduced a new method of painting in oil, a school of great painters who filled the churches and palaces of the city with luminous colors. There Giovanni Bellini, who was now in his sixties, was honored as though he were a doge, and the beloved old man distributed works of art among his pupils and fellow citizens. The young Giorgio Barbarelli, known among his companions as Giorgione, gave a glimpse of marvelous things to come in his first warm and bold canvases.

The young Florentine did not know these artists, perhaps because he did not seek them out, but he must have gone into the churches of the Frari, San Zaccaria, San Giovanni and Paolo, and seen their works of art. Interested in sculpture rather than in painting, he admired most the beautiful Eve of Antonio Rizzo.

Meantime he was spending but not earning; his scant sav-

ings disappeared, and he was forced to leave. Venice, so soft and dreamy, so different from his alert and turbulent Florence, could not hold him.

So far the trip had been uneventful, but in Bologna, on the way back, it threatened to become most unpleasant. A curious custom, in force at that time in Bologna, decreed that no outsider could enter the city without having a certain seal imprinted upon his thumb by the customs officer. The traveling Florentines, ignorant of the law, did not have their thumbs marked with the seal and so were condemned to pay a fine of fifty *bolognini* which, since they did not have it, they would have had to work out in prison. But Providence, in the person of Gianfrancesco Aldovrandi, who was one of the Sixteen rulers of the city, intervened. Aldovrandi happened to be passing through the customs office when the difficulty arose, and, being a kindly gentleman, he had the prisoners freed and invited their leader to his house. He perceived the boldness, gentleness, and intelligence that emanated from the rough, misshapen face. When he learned that Michelangelo was a sculptor, he thought he would like to keep him and give him work. Michelangelo thanked him but excused himself for being unable to accept.

"I have to look after my two companions, sir, whose expenses I have been paying. I cannot let them go alone."

The gentleman jokingly replied:

"Now I, too, shall travel with you, if you will pay my expenses."

In the end, however, attracted by the hope of good work and a quiet life, Michelangelo made a present to his companions of what little money remained and stayed as a guest in the Aldovrandi house, just as he had been, until a short time ago, a guest in the Medici house. Piero too, exiled with his family and followers, was taking shelter in Bologna at that time.

The Aldovrandis' hospitality lasted for a year. Life there was leisurely and cultivated, as it had been in the Medici house, without, however, the same degree of refinement and lavishness. Messer Gianfrancesco, although he did not himself write, also

loved literature in his amateur Bolognese fashion. He knew perhaps that the cultured style of Italian poetry had been born, on a day now long distant, from the pen of a compatriot of his, but he knew too, through daily experience, that the speech in Bologna nowadays was rough while in Florence it was not. During the winter evenings, in front of the fire, he had Michelangelo read him a canto of Dante, or a poem of Petrarch, or a short story of Boccaccio until, listening drowsily to the voice of the Florentine, he fell asleep.

Here beyond the Apennines, life was peaceful while Florence teemed in riot and revolt; it was a busy life, and not unprofitable. In the arch of San Domenico, sculptured by Nicola da Bari, who from the day of its completion became known as Niccolò dell' Arca, two statues were missing, a San Petronio, and an angel who was to hold a candelabrum upright on his knee. Aldovrandi arranged to have them assigned to his protégé, who quickly sculptured them to the satisfaction of his admiring patron, also adding to them a St. Proculus, for which he received a payment of thirty crowns.

His protector's admiration spread in the artistic circles of the city, where, however, jealousy and distrust were breeding. He was certainly bold, the beardless interloper, who had come to throw disorder into their nest. And it was unworthy of a gentleman to take the bread out of the mouths of his fellow citizens by giving it to an outsider. A certain sculptor of unknown name, to whom the two statues of the arch had first been promised, became threatening. Michelangelo then deemed it prudent to return to Florence. He was also in a hurry to take home those first earnings to his father, who was waiting for him.

For himself he took something more precious. He had seen and studied at length in the portals of San Petronio the marvelous reliefs of Jacopo della Quercia, a sculptor who had worked apart from the current trends and whom his contemporaries hardly knew. He admired particularly the Madonna with the Babe in her lap which later, in sculpturing his own Madonnas and Infants, he was always to remember.

CHAPTER IV

IN FLORENCE, in his father's house, he found sufficient room to fix up a studio with a few blocks of stone, a bag of chalk, and a board on which to spread out his cartoons. He spent a good deal of his time in drawing, but he studied and worked more in the den that the prior of Santo Spirito had given him in his monastery. A secret complicity had been established between the old priest and the young artist, who found the intoxication of dangerous adventure in those excursions on the other side of the Arno. The study of anatomy was not one to bring cheer to a young man already inclined to melancholy. The sight of bits of flesh in a state of decomposition, the touching and searching of bones, muscles, and tendons, even if done only for study, always induces thoughts of death.

These were days of violent emotions. Thoughts of death, penitence, and punishment and the anger of God were present even outside the monastery, in the air shaken by the invectives and invocations of the Dominican friar and of his followers. The soul of that ardent apostle of the free and virtuous life, which once had had such happy expressions of candor and innocence, had darkened in the volcanic fumes of his own words. And in politics the tribune of reform had become an almost war-like dictator.

Michelangelo withdrew further into the forbidding shell of his solitary nature, which was averse to any excesses of exaltation. Only the gentle Granacci came to visit him and admire his work. Botticelli, with whom he had willingly talked about art and discoursed on Dante, had renounced the world, after so much joyous work and so much joy of living, and had taken refuge in an anchorite existence. True, the artists and the men of the Signoria could not ignore Michelangelo. When Savonarola began the construction of the Grand Council Hall, the commission wanted to consult this very young sculptor. The Medici cousins who ostentatiously had called themselves the Popolani

to show their opposition to the lavishness and waste of the older branch of the family, made friends with him.

When he again had in his hands a piece of marble, the young sculptor, who had drunk his first draught of beauty in a lovely Greek garden, felt the need of reacting against the feeling of sadness which, diffused in the air, was beginning to invade his spirit. He had already sculptured a crucifix, an angel, and two saints. Now from his hands came forth the form of an exquisitely beautiful child, stretched out in a quiet and graceful pose, a sleeping Cupid. Lorenzo de' Medici the Younger, to whom he showed it only when it was completely finished, thought that he was being deceived—was it really his work or had he found it in an excavation? It lacked only the patina of time to make it look as though it had actually been found in an excavation. He suggested to his friend that if he were to treat it in some way to make it look like an antique he would then be able to find a wealthier buyer.

And this was done. The sculptor, adept at trickery, buried his Cupid for some time in such a way that when it was dug up it really looked as though fifteen centuries had passed over it. An art dealer, a certain Baldassare, took it to Rome where he sold it to Cardinal Riario di ⁱⁿ Giorgio for two hundred ducats. The dealer pocketed one hundred and seventy of them and sent only thirty to its author.

It was a swindle and the young artist thought that the sum should have been shared more equitably. He liked money which he had never had in any quantity and the little he had he saved scrupulously. But he disliked cheats even more than he liked money. He was thinking of a way to go to Rome in order to take the dishonest man by the throat and make him give up the stolen money, when rumor reached the ears of the Cardinal that his statue was nothing but the forgery of a Florentine sculptor. Riario sent a nobleman of his court to Florence to investigate, and the nobleman, after having visited various artists' shops, came at last to Michelangelo's.

He came, he said, to purchase works of art for his master and begged the young man to show him what he had done. There was the bas-relief of the Centaurs, but he showed it to no one for he never wanted to sell it. Nor did he show the Madonna of the Stairs. He said he had nothing to show the Cardinal's messenger, but as the latter insisted upon having something to take back to Rome, Michelangelo in order to get rid of him took a sheet of paper and rapidly sketched a hand so graceful that the messenger marveled at its beauty. Michelangelo wished the nobleman Godspeed, but the latter delayed and started to tell him the story of the Cupid. Michelangelo cut him short and told him, without further ado, that the Cupid was his work. Something, he felt, was bound to come of this.

Perhaps the Cardinal would force the dealer to give the artist his due share of the money. The nobleman, in fact, promised him this, and indicated that the Cardinal would commission him to do more work if he came to Rome. Instead, the avaricious Cardinal, who wanted only to recover the two hundred crowns he had paid, returned the statue to the dealer. It was certainly avarice, but it was also, perhaps, his exact way of evaluating the work. This sculptor was after all only a boy, and two hundred crowns was two hundred crowns. Meanwhile, Michelangelo felt that he was the most duped of them all but in hopes that he would at least be able to get back his statue, he accepted the invitation of the nobleman and followed him to Rome.

People from everywhere were flocking there. For several decades the center of Italian art had been shifting from Florence to Rome and the Vatican like a magnet attracted the most famous. Sixtus IV and Alexander VI had summoned there Rossellino, Perugino, Botticelli, Mantegna, Melozzo da Forlì, Signorelli, the Pollaiuolos. Florence still remained the school; Rome was becoming the market. The Florentine nursery had become too thickly planted. Contemporaries said that its soil was fertilized by the native disposition of a people prone to discussion and criticism who cultivated their bent still further by education, the better to beat their opponents. But at a certain time the saplings

must be removed from the nursery where they crowd each other, and be transplanted to a permanent place. There were too many artists in Florence—rivals among each other but too similar in their art. To acquire personality, to emerge, to earn, it had become necessary to leave Florence. Leonardo had left some years before; now Michelangelo wanted to get out, and Raphael, after a short stay, would also leave.

The first days, the first months, in Rome were idle ones. Michelangelo received no more money from the dealer, a coarse and loutish man who, far from inviting forgiveness, only reminded Michelangelo of the ugly manners of Torrigiano. Nor did he get back his Cupid, for from the hands of the dealer it went to the court of the Gonzagas at Mantua, from there to France, and from France no one knows where, for it, too, was lost.

Cardinal Riario di San Giorgio was a very wealthy man, powerful and ostentatious. He lived in the palace of the Cancelleria, the most beautiful one in Rome, which he had had built for himself not long before. There he had surrounded himself with a court, or a cohort of nobles, among whom were at least ten or twelve high prelates. He received the young sculptor, asking him if he could make something beautiful (he must have resembled the Ariosto-like Cardinal d'Este), and Michelangelo in words that appeared to be modest and yet contained all the consciousness he had of his extraordinary potentialities, said: "I shall not make anything big, Your Eminence, but you will see what I can do."

Everything ended on that promise, for the Cardinal did not give him any work, and only invited him to see his collection of antiquities. They were not impressive. Michelangelo preferred to look for his antiquities among the ruins of the Capitoline Hill. The deepest impression upon him was made by the remains of the Colosseum, where, at twilight, the stones of the copings seemed crowned with flames, burning like an immense pyre, evocative of Savonarola. He went back every day to contemplate and study it. He liked modern Roman architecture less;

indeed Rome, in comparison with his airy and harmonious Florence, was, except for the immense ruins, little more than a large village of cowherds and pigherds, a tangle of narrow alleys, dark and filthy, between the Campidoglio and the Vatican. The recently erected Cardinals' palaces, built close together and compact like fortresses, enclosed in their interior ample courtyards decorated with charming loggias, airy terraces, and fresh gardens, with fountains in the middle: propitious spots for learned gatherings and quiet amusements if they had not, instead, been the meeting place and den for every conceivable vice. This, above all, offended the ingenuousness of the provincial youth, whose ideal had been nourished with sermons drawn from the Gospels, discussions of poetry and Platonic philosophy. Vice was also to be found elsewhere, but in Rome it was the ostentation of vice, the vainglory of corruption.

There were recorded in the city registers sixty-eight hundred prostitutes, and the women who had a right to a higher classification did not figure in them. It was said that Venice had thirteen thousand, but Venice was inhabited by three hundred thousand people, monks excluded, and Rome by only fifty thousand. There were endless carnivals, lasting two or three months; the one that coincided with the marriage of Lucrezia Borgia lasted for half a year. Every morning people who had been stabbed to death, and those who had been poisoned in alcoves, were found in the streets. Seven abbots were made bishops by the Pope in one day, and five of them were found hanged on the next. The young provincial who saw corruption spread like a leprosy on the walls of the city remained untouched. He would have left but he had to work. And the work, which he did not find at the court of Cardinal di San Giorgio, was offered him by a cultivated nobleman, a friend of artists, who had a palace near the Cardinal's—Jacopo Galli.

Michelangelo had received an order from Piero, and grudgingly got ready to sculpture something for his former lord, but the manners of the Medici exile were no better than those of the Medici master of Florence and ideator of a snowman, so Michel-

angelo's lukewarm wish to please disappeared completely. He decided to carve something that would show his talent and his taste, so that people would be forced to admire him. He had done that once not long before, on the good advice of Poliziano, but the young artist felt he had grown a great deal since then. He had an almost gay idea. For five crowns he bought a block of marble but was dissatisfied with it. Then he bought another one and set to work. He was already hewing his statue from it when Jacopo Galli, upon seeing it, wanted it for himself and paid him generously for it. He finished the statue, which is that of an adolescent Bacchus in a state of amiable drunkenness. He sways lightly on legs heavy with drink, stiff from knee to ankle, and in the right hand holds up a goblet into which he smiles and winks with a languid and vacant eye. The mouth is half open, like that of someone who has drunk but wants to drink again, and above, the wide face of a sensuous boy. At his feet a young faun picks at a cluster of grapes which the god holds in his left hand.

Jacopo Galli was enthusiastic about his beautiful statue and about its creator. In that world of merchants and patrons, he spread his admiration for a work of art that he thought the most lifelike and eloquent he had ever seen. He became the promoter of the new genius risen in the world of sculpture. He asked him for another statue and Michelangelo sculptured for him a second Cupid, different from the first—a little older, agile and slim, driving a chariot. Jacopo Galli then obtained for him an order from Cardinal Jean de la Groslaye de Villiers, abbot of San Dionigi. Michelangelo told the Cardinal that he would like to try a *Pietà*. He wanted to choose the block himself which could not be found in Rome because of its shape and size, so he went to Carrara after a contract, which stipulated that he would be paid four hundred and fifty ducats, was drawn up.

He had dreamed about this for years, perhaps from the time of the gardens of San Marco, from the time of his first stones and his first tools. In Rome ancient art attracted him, and here, in Carrara, eternal nature. In Rome he had studied, observed, ad-

mired; he had made his hands skilled in the use of instruments: here he continued to dream, and his spirit grew and soared. His method of conceiving and imagining great things beyond the limits of form and human life had developed in the atmosphere of Rome, a city built by giants for a race of giants, and here, in the very midst of nature, creator of gigantic works, he found the means of sustaining his dreams. This was his domain; here he could roam freely. This was the material that he would fight and conquer with his will, the material which was not inert but only asleep, which he would awaken to eternal life.

These were happy months, and later, in order to recapture that happiness, he often returned to the mountains of Carrara.

* * *

Back in Rome with his block already in great part roughed out, he set to work with such enthusiasm that in a little over a year the *Pietà*, which is in his chapel in St. Peter's in Rome, was completely finished, and without any help from young pupils. It was a work that would have required considerably more time from a less impetuous and expert sculptor.

Even before this group was exhibited, Jacopo Galli went about saying that Rome had never seen nor ever would see a more beautiful work of art. In fact, he had guaranteed it in writing in the contract: "It will be the most beautiful work in marble today in Rome, and one which no master will surpass." When the piece of sculpture was seen, the Romans agreed with the words of the enthusiast. The sad and innocent grace, a serene acceptance of grief in the bowed, sweet face of the mother, what lightness in her limbs! The relaxed body of the Son, whom she supports so gently on her lap, breathing His last breath, is all spirit; the earthliness of His body is on the point of fading into eternity. And the entire group, in every line, in every space of shadow and light, is in perfect harmony.

The Bacchus had been appreciated rather than admired for its refreshing carnality, for the realism of its attitude and expression, but also very much discussed. The myth translated into

the reality of the present time, the humanization of a god, had not appealed to everyone. Some had found the work too daring and others too absurd. Shelley three centuries later did not like it either. In this graceful and joyous allegory of drunkenness, he saw only the deplorable product of the imagination of a Catholic who had wanted to represent in human shape a pagan deity. But Shelley was wrong. Here the Christian and Catholic spirit has not affected the ancient allegory because it has nothing to do with it. And among the pagan deities Bacchus, created to reign over the senses, is certainly the most human, the closest to earth.

The young Buonarrotti continued dreaming. The Bacchus was to be the realization of his last dream before serious thoughts occupied him entirely—thoughts which, with an ever-increasing and painful intensity, were to assume the aspect of drama.

General admiration and marvel greeted the *Pietà*. Tradition had been surpassed; Donatello, Ghiberti, and Jacopo della Quercia seemed far away. Rumor ran in Rome and was spread elsewhere that the greatest sculptor of the century had come forth. Jacopo Galli was right. Henceforth countless *Pietàs* in sculpture and in painting were to follow, and except for the ones that Michelangelo would himself do, they would all be inspired by this first one. Grief and death, which for a hundred years had gone into exile, were to return to Italian art. And they penetrated profoundly to take an eternal place in the soul of the young artist so sensitive to grief and to the sentiment of death, so precociously withdrawn from the joy of living.

* * *

Now, after four years in Rome, he could return to Florence. He brought to his family a bag of ducats and gold florins such as they had never seen; to friends and rivals he brought a name that promised to eclipse them all. In his pocket he carried a good new contract for fifteen life-size marble statues that the provident Galli had obtained for him from Cardinal Piccolomini, who wanted to decorate the family chapel in the cathedral in Siena. Siena is nearer to Florence than to Rome, and it was

easier to work in Florence than in Rome because the cost of living was lower.

He returned to Florence with Pietro di Giannotto, a young man whom he had taken with him from there as a companion. He also had to rid himself of the nausea of the Roman filth. He found greater freedom of body and spirit in Florence, which had succeeded in appeasing Cesare Borgia with gold, and had rid itself of both the Medici and of Savonarola.

CHAPTER V

IN THOSE DAYS two other names became known in Florence which, together with Michelangelo's, formed the brightest constellation in the heavens of universal art. One, considerably older and laden with fame—Leonardo da Vinci, a handsome man with a calm brow, azure-blue eyes, and a flowing beard, of noble birth and manner—was returning to his native city after having traveled throughout Italy. Moving from court to court, he had worked at painting, sculpture, hydraulic engineering, had studied the occult sciences, and had accomplished what appeared to be magic in the fields of mechanics, astronomy, and anatomy. As a painter he had created in Milan a masterpiece, the fresco of the Last Supper in the convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, and as a sculptor an equestrian statue of Francesco Sforza, which had been destroyed by the French soldiery. The other was younger than he, still almost a boy, a handsome youth, native of the Marche, who had first studied painting in his native province under the guidance of his father and then in Perugino's school. He had already painted a few sweet-looking Madonnas in the Umbrian churches. Those Madonnas, painted at first in the style of the master, were distinguished by a grace and harmony of movement and color that appeared miraculous in the artist's time. His name was Raphael Sanzio.

Raphael, who at that time was painting the Marriage of the Virgin, studied the Madonnas and saints that Fra Bartolommeo,

who had again taken up his brushes, was painting on large canvases in the churches. Leonardo was designing flying machines and war machines. In his hours of leisure he worked slowly at the portrait of a young woman who passed mysteriously through life and has remained a mystery in art. She was called Mona Lisa, or La Gioconda, by posterity, even though in the painting she scarcely smiles. The young man from Urbino was not yet twenty and, given his mild disposition, he was perhaps awed by the great artistic forces concentrated in Florence at that time but he certainly was not overwhelmed by them. His open and gentle countenance attracted people to him, his ability inspired surprised delight and he made his way so rapidly and carefully that all obstacles seemed to vanish in his passing. The great and wise da Vinci, wealthy and laden with honors, protégé and favorite of the head of the Florentine Republic, Pier Soderini, rode contentedly on horseback through the streets of the city at the head of a cavalcade of servants and followed by young artists who were paying him court. He was then fifty years old.

The rough-mannered Buonarrotti did not seek intimacy with either Raphael or Leonardo. He found the companionship of the faithful Granacci, Sangallo, and a few others all that he wanted. He foresaw Raphael's rapid rise in the world of art, but he did not think highly of him as a painter because he felt he had given himself up to the trade, with his bland Madonnas that he still painted in the style of Perugino, and he despised Raphael as a man fond of ease and good living. Michelangelo had no great admiration either for Perugino, who also had a school in Florence, a rich house, and fat commissions. He did not like Leonardo, even though he understood how great was his genius and how much culture, how much enthusiasm, how much scope there was in that great intellect. He disliked him because of the worldliness, the Epicurean paganism of his mode of life, for a certain theatrical quality in his manner, and perhaps also because of the abstruse torments of the inner life which, it seemed to him, clouded the serene vision of the artist as well as his Christian sentiment. Outside the gate of San Gallo there was a gay inn,

famous at that time as a meeting place for traveling artists and beautiful complaisant women. Leonardo sometimes put in an appearance there with his followers; Michelangelo, never. There was talk of spiteful and reciprocal jealousy, but perhaps outside natural rivalry there was no enmity and the chief cause of the lack of understanding that always kept them apart was the difference in their ages: twenty-three years are as great between two artists as between two women. And certainly the ascetic who leans thoughtfully toward the past is a different man from the naturalist who stretches inquisitively toward the future.

It was rumored that altercations and quarrels occurred between the two, even on the public street, when Leonardo, who considered himself alone well versed in Dante, tried to embarrass the younger man by quoting a line from that poet. Michelangelo, who, unknown to Leonardo, was equally familiar with Dante's verses, replied rudely and bitingly, suggesting that he return to those "Milanese capons" to be admired by them. But this sort of thing does not usually happen in public, even on a Florentine Lungarno of the sixteenth century.

* * *

Michelangelo did not envy the acclaim Florence gave Leonardo and Raphael as painters, but he wanted to excel in sculpture, an art he considered superior to the other.

While passing through the city one day, he happened to see an enormous block of marble that had lain for about half a century on the stones and grass near the unfinished buildings of Santa Maria del Fiore. The clumsy Agostino di Duccio had undertaken to rough it out, then had abandoned it, badly damaged, not knowing what to do with it. It had been offered to Donatello, who had refused it. Now it was said that Leonardo was hovering around it in order to keep it from falling into Michelangelo's hands—a rumor spread, perhaps, so as to incite the young sculptor to ask for it for himself. Andrea Sansovino made an offer to the guild which at that time was in charge of the cathedral construction, to fashion a statue out of it if pieces that he needed

could be added. Michelangelo did not need additional pieces, so the block was given to him. The contract was drawn up on August 15th of the year 1501. The artist was given two years to complete the work and assigned six ducats a month. It was left to the conscience and to the judgment of the members of the guild to determine what the total payment should be. Michelangelo set to work on September 13th.

Two years were spent by Michelangelo in a feverish and rapt struggle in the airy shed where he was imprisoned by his will to work. He was deaf to every worldly voice, indifferent to the entanglement of affections, blindfolded against every attraction and temptation, regardless of how strong, against every other aspect of beauty that was not germane to his idea. In the life of every great creative artist there come, sooner or later, two or three years which are definitive. Before those years he is only an instinctive force that seeks to develop and orient itself. After those years he will have nothing further to add to his art except a greater technical skill, the shaping of his interior world being completed and his will a force that acts without his experiencing either effort or fatigue.

Michelangelo's spark of genius had kindled into flame in Rome between 1497 and 1501, between the Bacchus and the *Pietà*. He had carried his genius whole and defined to Florence, where, attacking the large marble block, he now knew he would do great things. Henceforth, with every new work that he undertook, he foresaw that he would accomplish something great.

Before again taking the chisel and mallet in the bony, knotty hands that were the visible expression of his will, he had covered countless papers with drawings, and he continued drawing even when working. He drew ten, twenty heads before choosing the final one. He relaxed by drawing and writing poetry. This was the work of a slave and of a god. It was entirely the product of his own genius, the realization of an idea wholly his: David, the hero of the myth and of his will—revolt against evil, the challenge, personified in youth, to an unknown enemy. The marble had been deformed by the first bungler, and inclemencies of the

weather during fifty years had damaged it in several places; these were difficulties with which he would struggle, and which he would overcome. On one of the drawings he wrote: "David with the sling and I with the bow." The bow of his genius against the giants of matter and of life.

He worked alone, refusing help even in blocking out the stone. He worked without any help except that of two small wax and clay models, and partial drawings to which he did not adhere. He had so clearly defined his idea in his mind's eye that he saw it as a real thing, solid, omnipresent, and could attack the stone directly in order to extract it. His savage way of working naturally aroused, besides the inevitable malice of the poor in spirit, the admiration and curiosity of the administrators of the cathedral works, who wanted to know at least how their money was being spent. Toward the end of February, 1503, seventeen months from the time he had begun the work which was to be completed in two years, he felt it well on the way to being finished and consented to let them view it. They saw something white, tall, alive, which overwhelmed them as would a luminous apparition. The moment for a clear and defined contract had come, and the able and efficient artist asked for four hundred gold florins, which the guild paid without haggling.

They then ordered more work from him: statues of the twelve Apostles to be placed in the façade of Santa Maria del Fiore, and as a reward started to build him a handsome house in Borgo Pinti, of which a twelfth part of the ownership was to be given him upon the delivery of each statue. The Republic also commissioned him to do a free copy in bronze of Donatello's small David, to be offered to the King of France, Louis XII, as a token of gratitude for the assistance given Florence in the conquest of Arezzo. For this he was allowed six months' time. He dedicated a few hours to the latter and a few to the former, as a distraction. There was still the obligation of the fifteen statues for the Piccolomini Chapel in Siena, while he waited to put the final touches to the great work. In the autumn of 1503, punctually at the expiration of the contract, the David was completed.

Recent Florentine sculpture already had two Davids, but both were smaller than life size, almost drawing-room statuettes, and very beautiful. Donatello's was tender and supple, Verrocchio's elegant and graceful. It was essential that this giant be put in an appropriate place. At the first of the new year there was called a council of the major artists, sculptors, painters, and architects then working in Florence. There were Leonardo, Botticelli, Rosselli, the Sangallos, Perugino, Piero di Cosimo, Filippino Lippi, Granacci, Lorenzo di Credi, Simone Pollaiuolo, Andrea della Robbia, Andrea Sansovino. There were also goldsmiths, jewelers, needleworkers, engravers, metalworkers—all the Florentine artists and artisans, a marvelous gathering of masters the equal of which had never been seen around the masterpiece of any young man. Most of them thought the best place would be the Piazza del Duomo or the central arch of the Loggia dei Lanzi, but each had a different idea. Giuliano da Sangallo, who was chiefly concerned with the harmful effects that constant exposure to the weather would have upon the marble, which he thought was of too soft a grain, proposed the inside of the Loggia, where the statue would have a dark background; and Leonardo lent his authoritative support to the architect's opinion. But was this not sacrificing the greatness and the beauty of the colossus to its well-being? Others suggested the top of the stairs in front of the Palazzo della Signoria, which was at that time occupied by Donatello's Judith and which seemed to some to be an evil omen, "a sign of death." Still others thought of the courtyard of the palace, which actually was too narrow for so large an object, and so dark.

But ought not the author to have something to say in the matter? A certain Salvestro, a goldsmith, proposed that Michelangelo's opinion be asked. Michelangelo replied that he wanted the David to be put in the Judith's place, on the platform of the Palazzo della Signoria. And Michelangelo's desire was followed.

The moving of the giant statue from the shed behind the Duomo to the platform of the Signoria was a memorable undertaking. The framework was a happy invention of *il Cronaca* (Simone Pollaiuolo), one of the architects of the Strozzi Palace

who had designed the Grand Council Hall. On the morning of May 14th, suspended and bound in the enormous cage, the David started on the road to its destination. One wall of the shed had been knocked down in order to take it out. Forty men pulled with ropes or supported the framework in their arms, and a troop of guards escorted it, keeping watch over it during the night while others slept. The artist, worried and feverish, also kept an eye on it. It was feared that an attempt against the statue would be made, for already stones had been thrown at the naked giant on the preceding night, though no harm had been done. The body was protected within the framework, but the head emerged free and exposed as a target.

The trip lasted four days, and for four nights the youth was guarded against enemies. Crowds collected to watch the slow journey, admiring the thoughtful and tormented head, taller than the copings of the houses. Men swarmed at its feet while the proud head of the giant gazed far away toward infinity. At noon on the eighteenth day of May the procession arrived in front of the Signoria. On the eighth of June the David was set in place.

The people looked in astonishment at the magnificent statue, proudly nicknamed it the Giant, and arranged trysts in its shadow, especially in the twilight hours when the sun, lighting it up against the iron-gray background of the palace, made the white marble gleam like a great phosphorescent flower on the dark stone of the palace. Subsequent events in the city were dated from that eighth day of June, birth of the Giant.

The company of artists who were decorating and illustrating Florence, friends and foes, rivals and enviers, old grumblers and young enthusiasts, supporters and detractors, acclaimed the work of their colleague and understood how far ahead of every other piece of sculpture of the century this new statue was. Hewn out of a shapeless block and still showing in certain places the roughness of the old surface, it was so free, lithe, and harmonious that it did not betray the effort of construction wrought within the limits of a stone that had already been cut

into. It was said, in jest, that Pier Soderini had found the statue's nose too large, but an artist somehow learns to expect this sort of thing.

It is not known if anyone recognized the new spirit that penetrated the marble and saw the challenge which the young artist threw to the future in creating a hero who was both chaste and virile, a simple shepherd and a man inspired by God. In this statue the Greek world penetrated the Christian world, mingling with it in harmony and equilibrium. Religious spirit animated the pagan form; thought was imbued with grace, giving it new vigor.

CHAPTER VI

20 FLORENCE had its most beautiful and largest statue, and the people loved it and spread its fame beyond Italy. But its creator had already detached himself from it and was thinking of something else. He felt a growing unrest, an impatience, which denied him the happiness of ever being satisfied with his work.

He was pleased at having overcome the difficulties, but they had been primarily technical difficulties of workmanship, and his spirit sought other obstacles. This accomplished craftsman who could model marble as though it were wax, this skillful artist who could draw the human body in all its expressions and movements, had been for some time aware of his technical maturity; he now felt that the man within the artist had matured.

He had studied a great deal during these years: to Dante, Petrarch, and Plato he had added the Bible, and he had lost himself in this fabulous narrative as others lose themselves in pleasure. From a group of painters, sculptors, architects, all more or less literate, he stood out as one of the most cultivated. And he meditated as he read. Within the creative genius of the artist a mystic thought had developed, a severely religious spirit that now wanted to translate its religion into the grace and power of visible forms.

He had likewise loved a great deal, and he still loved, but love in his heart was an emotional ecstasy, a feeling of pain, an annulment of his being. He fed on beauty and was absorbed in the contemplation of it. This much may be guessed from a portrait later placed in his house by his heirs, which was painted when Michelangelo was not quite thirty years old. The face, with its haughty look, its high forehead wrapped in a turban, its nose flattened by the blow from Torrigiano's fist, already shows signs of strain in its premature wrinkles. He wanted the city he loved to bloom again after the devastation that had followed in the wake of Savonarola, but the echoes of the thunderous extoller of virtue and renunciation still lingered in his mind. He looked from afar at the David now dominating the great square, and it seemed to him more beautiful than ever, but it was no longer his. His youth was past. The David was his own youth, which was drifting away from him. It was to be for generation after generation the symbol of universal youth.

His independent spirit naturally did not permit him to work by commission. Of the fifteen statues for the Piccolomini Chapel in Siena he finished only four and then stopped. It would have been a work in installments, which would have dried up the wells of his inspiration. He turned to the statues of the Apostles of Santa Maria del Fiore, and attacked the first of the twelve blocks that awaited him. He started with a St. Matthew, which was barely roughed out. This is the first of Michelangelo's great unfinished statues, perhaps the most mysterious and most tragic. The athletic body of the Apostle struggles unsuccessfully to free itself from the stone, but remains enclosed within it. The head is still shapeless rock, while the knee and the torso, which foreshadow the tactile quality of the Prophets and the Sybils of the Sistine Chapel, are already living flesh.

He gave up any idea of paid employment. He lost the house that the Opera del Duomo had started to build for him, but he did not need it. He lived on little and most of what he earned was saved and put in the bank. He had already saved a sum that seemed fabulous to him and he managed it shrewdly. Though he

would not have the handsome house in Borgo Pinti, there were others. And he could also buy new farms for his father to add to the one he already owned in Settignano. He wanted his father to live comfortably and peacefully. He wanted his brothers to love and respect him. When his brothers showed disrespect for their father, he reproved and threatened them. And once, when one of the three ne'er-do-wells, Giovan Simone, tried to throw their father out, Michelangelo, who was far away, wrote him a stinging letter:

“ . . . Now I am sure that you are not my brother, because if you were you would not threaten my father; nay, instead you are a beast and I shall treat you as one. Know that he who sees his father threatened or roughly handled is bound to risk his own life in this cause. Let this suffice. I tell you that you have nothing in the world, and if I hear one word about your ways of carrying on, I shall come to Florence by the post and show you how far wrong you are, and teach you to waste your possessions and set fire to houses and farms that you have not earned. You are not where you think. If I come, I shall give you something to weep hot tears about, and you will see upon what you base your arrogance.

“I have this to say to you again: If you will endeavor to live rightly and honor and revere your father, I shall help you as I have helped the others and shall make it possible for you soon to open a good shop. If you do not, I shall come and settle your affairs in such a way that you will know what you are better than you have ever known before and you will know what you have in the world and will see it in every place you go. Enough. What I lack in words I shall supply by action.”

“Michelagnolo in Rome.”

And not satisfied with this, he added:

“I cannot refrain from writing you another two lines, and this is that I have dragged a wretched existence for twelve years throughout Italy; borne every shame, suffered every hardship, worn my body out in every kind of toil, exposed my life to a thousand dangers, with the sole purpose of helping my family,

and now that I have begun to raise it up a little, you alone want to be the one to destroy and ruin in one hour what it took me so many years and so much effort to accomplish. By Christ's body, this shall not be! For I am the man to rout ten thousand of your sort, whenever it is needed. Now be good and do not try the patience of one who has other things to think about."

He tried indeed to place these three shiftless brothers in comfortable positions. For Buonarrotto he found a good position in the shop of the Strozzi in Porta Rossa. Even Giovan Simone adapted himself more or less to this work. Gismondo became a soldier of fortune.

For this reason also he left Florence, for here he had lost the blissful solitude that he had known in Rome. He had seen too many artists, even though he tried to avoid them. There were too many family troubles, even though he did not live at home. He wanted to attend to every need of his father and brothers, but their mediocrity distressed him.

As a sculptor he heard it said by everyone that there was no one alive to equal him. After the David, interrupting the series of saints and Apostles, he had turned of his own volition to Madonnas. He had sculptured two *tondi*, or medallions, in high relief and a beautiful group, a little larger than life size, of a seated Madonna supporting a standing Infant. The Infant has a sad, wondering, unsmiling face, withdrawn from the outside world, with a look turned wholly inward. The Madonna repeats with a more decisive grace the expression and almost the attitude of the *Pietà* sculptured before in Rome; perhaps she was conceived at the same time. This young Mother, who ought to have been made happy by her miraculous maternity, seems rather more mature and sadder than the other Mother grieving over the lifeless body of her Son. She has a haughty, disdainful face, distrustful of the world. From her eyes, lowered upon an inner vision, pours a stunned melancholy, a bitter grief. The beautiful, compact, and towering group is in line with Michelangelo's fundamental principle of statuary; a marble group, he would say, should roll as from the top of a mountain without breaking in

any part—a principle learned, perhaps, from Jacopo della Quercia. Within twenty years he was to fashion another group even more compact, which would better put his principle into practice. This Madonna ended up in Bruges.

Everyone said that there was no one living to equal him as a sculptor. He also wanted it to be said of him as a painter. Leonardo had painted the portrait of Mona Lisa, but to Michelangelo this appeared an exercise in virtuosity rather than a living portrait. Raphael, in painting the Marriage of the Virgin, had poured an abundance of youthful grace into those figures, but the composition is still in the superficial and static style of his earliest period. Great art, instead, consists in penetrating and searching the soul—interpreting its movement in attitudes and gestures. Michelangelo then painted a *tondo* of the Sacred Family for the Florentine merchant Angelo Doni.

His genius carried him instinctively to opposition. He appreciated the works of other great artists and studied them the better to rid himself of their influence. Doing differently, he tried to do better. True, the effort sometimes failed. This Sacred Family of his, in color, design, composition, is without precedent. The fatherly St. Joseph, the buxom and happy Madonna who twists her body in an unnatural way as she takes the baby from the hands of her husband, the background of naked youths, comprise a whole that is not very moving, but it is striking and surprising in its bold manner of disposing the figures, of conceiving and expressing divine motherhood. All the art of the time idealized humanity. Michelangelo humanized, incarnated the ideal.

His estimation of his own work, the pride he had in it, and the determination that others appreciate these qualities were revealed in the following incident: He sent to Doni, together with the picture, a bill that stated its price to be seventy ducats. This seemed excessive to Doni, so he sent him only forty. Michelangelo immediately replied: "Send me back the painting; if you want it, it will be one hundred and forty ducats." And one hundred and forty ducats it was, according to Vasari who

tells the anecdote. It may not be true, but it is fitting. Perhaps in the end the price was only seventy ducats, the amount asked for in the first place.

In those days Leonardo was doing something else besides painting precious and inimitable pictures. Pier Soderini had entrusted him with the task of painting a fresco on one of the long walls of the Grand Council Hall in the palace of the Signoria. The artist had drawn the cartoon for it while working in the cloister of Santa Maria Novella, and he had now started to paint. His subject was the Battle of Anghiari, and never had such a powerful design been seen as in that tangle, contrast, and whirlwind of horses and horsemen. With patient application and a sharp eye that nothing escaped, the master had achieved an impressive reality in the drawing. Michelangelo had the divine gift of design, and he knew intuitively all the secrets of that art, which the study of anatomy had only served to develop and render more complex. Would he, then, not be able to do something similar—indeed, superior—to the work of his rival? He asked for, or was given, the task of painting a fresco on the other long wall of the hall.

Leonardo had painted the Battle of Anghiari; he would paint, for the glorification of the city, another Florentine victory, the Battle of Cascina. Leonardo had let his imagination go unbridled in his drawing of horses pawing the ground. Michelangelo would draw a spectacle never before seen by men. The battle was the pretext, the goal the drawing of nude bodies, of human groups in attitudes and movements that required the most skillful foreshortening to represent their sudden springing into action. The battle was invisible; only the combatants were seen, who, surprised at their bath, rose naked from the water and ran.

The nude was a conquest of the Renaissance, and Luca Signorelli had made an immense symphony of it in the Duomo of Orvieto. Had Michelangelo seen that fresco during his return from Rome to Florence? Whether he had or not is unimportant. If he had seen it, he certainly wanted to improve upon it. If he

had not seen it, he wanted to do more and better than all those who had painted mountains of nudes. "Lord, grant that I shall always want to do more than I can. . . ."

But the great contest was to remain in the minds of the two artists. Contemporaries caught a faint glimmer of it, as from a distance, but posterity not at all.

Leonardo, ever capricious in his work, experimenting with a new technique in mixing colors, had hardly begun to transfer his cartoon to the fresh plaster when the colors started fading almost under his brush, and he went no further. There had been some friction with Pier Soderini. Leonardo took offense at the manner in which the Gonfalonier paid him for some work already done. There was further disappointment in his unsuccessful attempt to conquer Pisa by diverting the waters of the Arno from the city. And besides, a secret melancholy weighed upon his unsatisfied and insatiable spirit, which he felt was growing old while all around him triumphant youth was rising. He lived with a relative in a house outside the city on the slope of Fiesole, and when he went into the town he felt like a stranger. He left Florence and again took up his wanderings through Italy, following in the wake of petty lords and gentlemen adventurers. He continued to indulge in strange, abstruse dreams and to invent war machines. He was soon to leave Italy, saddened and disillusioned, to work for the King of France and to die in exile.

Michelangelo did not even start his fresco, for he too left Florence when Julius II called him to Rome. His drawing was to remain incomplete for the time being. It was finished a few years later during a brief sojourn in Florence, but his work was never transferred from the cartoon to the walls of the Palazzo Vecchio. He locked the drawing up in a room of the cloister and ordered the custodians to guard the key jealously. He wrote to them, when he was far away, that no one was to be permitted to see it. Nonetheless, Raphael was able to study it and copy it secretly, at his ease. Other copies of this or that group were made by admirers, enemies, and friends, but only a few copies remain today, scattered in the museums of Europe. Aristotile da Sangallo copied

it in its entirety, and through him this drawing, by a man who was only thirty, became the basis of a school of design. Painters from Germany and Flanders came to learn drawing from the cartoon. Its fame spread to every part of Europe and was perpetuated like a legend, transmitted from generation to generation. In a few years it was reduced to pieces, scattered and lost.

Today, nothing remains of those two wonderful works of art done in a spirit of rivalry.

BOOK 2

CHAPTER VII: THE ROME OF JULIUS II
CHAPTER VIII: LOST YEARS CHAPTER IX:
THE SISTINE CHAPEL CHAPTER X: FAM-
ILY WOES CHAPTER XI: JULIUS II



CHAPTER VII



AFTER AN ABSENCE of five years Michelangelo could not expect to find Rome changed in customs or character, but knowing the city better, penetrating its secret meeting places, he sensed the luxury, sloth, and vice on which the city had fattened—a fatness that had turned into monstrous obesity. The nepotism of the last Popes had flooded it with cardinals, barons, and bastards; and cardinals, barons, and bastards, each surrounded by his own court, continued to populate it with more courtiers and men of letters, who were often one and the same.

Here rhymesters and grammarians from other cities congregated as in a rich pastureland. Some were already bloated with fame; others with little effort were soon to attain the same distended state. They were bloated in every sense of the word, in purse, in stomach, and in self-esteem. One need only glance at a portrait that Raphael painted later of one of these personages, Tommaso Inghirami, known as Phaedrus, a poet considered inspired and noble by his contemporaries but today unknown.

This life of lowly pleasures, of waste and thoughtlessness, stagnating among the seven hills of Rome, gave forth a vapor, hot and damp, in which vanity developed rapidly like a fungus and spread over every useful civic activity while free spirits were rotting in the academy.

A gay, turbulent, and rapacious swarm of Spanish locusts had descended, under the Spanish pontiff, mingling with the native butterflies and fly-by-nights, encouraging them in their aggressive and licentious ways. Their camping ground was between the Pozzo Bianco and the Tor di Nona. They formed what almost amounted to a corporation, and their names were bandied familiarly from mouth to mouth: Beatrice, Raffaella, Angioletta, Celestina, Tullia, Farfarella, Ciavattina, Caterina,

etc. Laundresses and seamstresses became great ladies. They owned coaches and rode horseback; they surrounded themselves with pages, handmaidens, servants. There were even some queen bees among them. They had their courts of princes, ambassadors, and bankers, and their meetings took place in the churches, chiefly in the churches of San Agostino and la Pace.

In a population of fifty thousand, about a third was composed of ecclesiastic dignitaries and their following, a third of ruffians, prostitutes, and the like, while the working class of artisans and merchants consisted of a scant ten thousand of the population. Dazzled by that spectacle of false grandeur and their resistance weakened by their participation in the benefices of that parasitic life, they dissipated their native virtues in sterile cynicism and vicious satire.

"Rome," said one of these satirists, "is the triumph of great lords, the paradise of women, the purgatory of the young, a hell for everyone, the burden of beasts, the illusion of the poor, the den of thieves."

The strong of spirit attempted to preserve their sanity by taking refuge in the vineyards, orchards, gardens, woods, and pastures that surrounded the city, only to fall victims there to malaria.

However, something new, an impatience with servility, an infusion of a warlike spirit in the soft effeminate life of the prelates, had been brought about by the advent to the papacy of the restless Cardinal della Rovere. Fewer sounds of revelry and more clanking of arms were beginning to be heard in the city. Julius II locked up with seven keys the treasure of St. Peter and tightened the purse strings of the dispensers of benefices and prebends. He dismissed the poets because he did not know what to do with their sonnets, and summoned architects, sculptors, and painters who with their work gave him something solid and lasting to enrich the Vatican.

Michelangelo was able to establish himself again in Rome and to pass uncontaminated across that hot, picturesque brothel between the Ponte Sisto and the Campo di Fiori because his na-

tive sanity preserved him from unhealthy contagions. A spirit of opposition to all current ideas and customs sometimes produces these happy results. He was not the man to let himself be bought by real gold or to be dazzled by false gold.

Arriving at the Vatican, he found that two great artists had preceded him, Bramante and Giuliano da Sangallo. Sangallo, who had been Julius II's architect for several years, had constructed for him while he was still a cardinal the fortress of Ostia. He had traveled and worked extensively, and now, eclipsed by the great Bramante, he remained the Pope's good counselor even through quarrels and outbursts of temper. Every now and then Sangallo, offended by the curt manners of the pontiff, left Rome only to come back, and Julius II continued to give him work and to abuse him. Finally he was replaced almost entirely in the good graces of the Pope by Bramante, who had arrived in Rome at the age of sixty—the same age as the Pope's—already laden down with fame as the leading architect of Italy. He had grandiose schemes, which could not displease the Pope, who had ascended the throne of St. Peter with the firm intention of making the papacy great and rich and feared although it had been impoverished by his predecessors' lavish mode of life. Bramante also lived sumptuously, but the Pope probably did not notice it, for all the society of the time lived or pretended to live sumptuously—all, that is, except the Pope himself, who was trying to inaugurate a regime of austerity and economy in the Vatican.

In order to confer greatness upon the papacy it was first necessary to enlarge the Vatican and the basilica of St. Peter. The old basilica was hardly more than a humble church dedicated to the early Apostles; in its place must be erected the greatest temple of Christendom.

Julius II, pursuing with all the ardor of his temperament the work scarcely begun by Nicholas V and Sixtus IV, ordered his architects to present their plans. He preferred Bramante's which was in the form of a Greek cross, powerful and severe. He put him in charge of the construction, entrusting him with the task of building the greatest temple of Christianity. Bramante began

by demolishing the old edifice, reducing the columns and pilasters to powder without any regard for art, religion, or economy.

At this point Michelangelo arrived in Rome.

* * *

He presented himself to His Holiness, asking for his orders, but His Holiness had something else on his mind at the moment: the war against the Malatestas and the Bentiviglios, who seemed to think themselves entitled to rule his domain; the conscription of soldiers, the signing of pacts with some of the best-armed states of Italy. He sent the young artist to study and see what the others were doing and to bring him plans.

It was at this time that the group of the Laocoön was found in the ruins of Titus' palace. Julius II had asked Sangallo to check its authenticity and, if it was authentic, to purchase it for the Belvedere. Michelangelo followed his friend. That tragic, despairing group and tangle, which was found in four pieces but which was easily restored, must have made a strong impression upon his spirit, so naturally sensitive to dramatic expression in art. He saw the analogy between this tragic group and his own genius struggling to free itself from the chains of tradition. But he also understood how much greater was the drama of the spirit as expressed in immobility than in the vain gesticulation of the statuary of the era of Greek decadence.

Michelangelo entered the grounds of St. Peter's and was looked upon as an inquisitive and insidious intruder. His eyes, which saw and remembered everything, seemed to be the eyes of a spy ferreting out all the secrets of art. His hands left their imprint upon everything he touched, as though correcting an error. Reproof was read in the naturally frowning lines of his forehead, and since this typical Florentine of the "piercing eyes and sharp tongue" was not one to mince words, he did not conceal his esteem for Bramante as an architect, for he too considered Bramante's plans superior to those of his friend Sangallo. Nor did he conceal his poor opinion of him as an administrator, adding that it was wrong to break up the columns of the ancient temple,

for they were too valuable to be destroyed and should be used, and that it was even worse to skimp on the cost of the pilasters, for his own profit, and to lay weak foundations made of inferior materials so that props and buttresses would have to be used. Sangallo, who had come to know him in Florence, remained his friend; Bramante hated him.

One day, having finally obtained a long audience with the Pope, he told him of a great project. He wanted to build him a tomb. Julius II, who was a strong old man, would live at least another ten years, but the artist would require at least that much time to complete his work. He had in mind something immense, to be placed in the middle of the new temple under construction, behind the main altar: forty statues, a veritable mountain of marble. As he spoke, he fired the Pope with his own enthusiasm. Julius II knew that he had found his man. He became impatient to see the beginning of the mountain of marble, the beginning of his immortality.

"How much will have to be spent?" asked the Pope.

"At least one hundred thousand crowns," said the sculptor.

"Let it be two hundred thousand." And the Pope beat his stick upon the ground. He sent Michelangelo to Carrara to excavate blocks of marble and transport them immediately to Rome.

Michelangelo left in the autumn and stayed in Carrara eight months. These were eight months of unceasing and happy labor, divided between work and dreams—eight months of contemplation as well as of activity. He found himself again in a world of stone, as though before an immense altar created by God for His worship. He found again, but in greater measure, the happiness glimpsed eight years before, when he was there for the first time. The intoxication he felt when he touched the marble, when he stroked its every vein and ridge, brought visions of infinite scope. In St. Peter's he would create a mountain of stone; here he would like to model the stone mountain created by God. He remembered the great statue of Athena raised by Phidias on the Parthenon so that navigators rounding Cape Sunium could see from afar the point of her lance and helmet. Here, between

Mounts Luni and Serravezza, he would fashion in the living stone a giant that would guide the navigators of the Tyrrhenian Sea.

At the end of eight months he had excavated all the blocks he needed and had had them lined up on the beach. He had hired boats from Portovenere for their shipment. Being a shrewd fellow citizen of the merchants of Florence he had put to good use the thousand ducats assigned to him by the papal administration. He had the marbles taken, some to Rome and some to Florence, where he would be able to work with more ease and less expense. He thought of dividing his life between the city of his father and the city of his Pope.

* * *

The voyage of the marbles was long and full of accidents. When they finally arrived in Rome, the people, who had never before witnessed such a spectacle, came running to see them stretched out in the fields around the basilica. The Tiber overflowed its embankments and made a lake of the countryside, covering the marbles with mud. But Buonarrotti was patient in adversities of this sort. Ordinarily feverish, as though obsessed in the impetuous act of creation, he proceeded calmly and methodically in this preparatory work. When his shop was ready, he started work. The Pope was pleased and told him to hurry.

Julius II had taken a great liking to the young sculptor. He sensed in his genius something of his own ambitious and restless soul. While Michelangelo explained his drawings in words few but exact, great words that conjured up before the eyes of the Pope a vision of grandeur and immortality, Julius II felt growing in him the will to power and glory. Impatient and authoritarian, he would have liked to span the limits of time, to upset the laws of nature and see rise before his eyes, as though by magic, the immense work that the artist had already built in his imagination. He often sought him out to see him battle against the stone, thinking that his presence was an incentive. In order to see him more often and on occasion to take him unawares, he had a se-

cret corridor built between his apartments and Michelangelo's workroom. A drawbridge connected the corridor to the workshop, and only the Pope was permitted to lower it.

But the impatient man was also changeable—a sphinx, said the ambassadors who had sought to know him—and the other thoughts that passed through his head wiped from his mind the thought of his tomb. The tomb was for the years, the centuries after his death; the centuries were many, but the years remaining to him were few; he was ambitious for earthly glory, the victory of arms, dominion over recalcitrant subjects, the sovereignty of the Church in Italy and in Europe. Ambition grew and funds shrank. Someone whispered in his ear that to build a tomb while he was still alive was an evil omen. Popes too have their superstitions. This someone was perhaps Bramante.

Bramante could not help but become jealous of the extent of the Pope's preoccupation with the merits and fortunes of the new arrival. It was the irritated and vindictive jealousy of an old man toward a young one. Now he would have to share the papal graces, which had been his alone for so long, with someone so much his junior that he would soon usurp them all. In short, Michelangelo's criticisms, which surely had reached his ears, of his work and his administration of the Pope's money were not calculated to soothe his proud spirit. And finally, the young man's sober existence, withdrawn and disdainful, was offensive to him and seemed a perpetual reproach to his own lavish way of life and to the society in which he moved. There was no doubt but that this flat-nosed Florentine was becoming a menace.

Henceforth Michelangelo had free access to the Vatican, the Pope having granted him leave to visit him at all hours, and at mealtimes especially he went to give an account of his work, to receive praise, encouragement, and reprimands. He also went for money, because the apprentices in his shop and the servants had to be paid. One day he found the Pope in a difficult humor, talking with the master of ceremonies and a goldsmith, grumbling that he did not want to spend another farthing on stones, either big or little, and he told Michelangelo to return on the fol-

lowing Monday. Michelangelo had understood the allusion, but he returned on Monday and found the door closed. He found it closed on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and a groom at the door, motionless and tight-lipped. A high prelate who was passing, amazed at the unheard-of prohibition and thinking that a mistake had been made, asked him if he knew the man to whom he was forbidding entry. The latter replied that he knew him well and it was precisely for that reason that he was carrying out his orders.

Michelangelo did not return to knock at Pope Julius' door again. He went home, packed his belongings, ordered his servant to sell his few pieces of furniture and to follow him by the post to Florence. He sent word to the Pope that if he was needed he would have to look for him elsewhere. It was a scornful message, typical of Michelangelo when his pride was hurt. But it was not only indignation that drove him from Rome. Fear was mingled with pride. He later confessed to a friend that rumors and threats had reached his ears which made him fear that before finishing the Pope's tomb he would have to attend to his own. Assassinations in the streets of Rome were still a daily occurrence, and now the city resounded more than ever to the clangor of men-at-arms. True, Bramante was an artist, but it would not be very difficult for him to hire a cutthroat. There had already been more than one violent death by poison or dagger among the artists, and Michelangelo remembered them: Masaccio, Lippi, Andrea del Castagno. His troubled mind saw shadows in ambush at every corner.

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He reached Poggibonsi at night, where messengers of the Pope caught up with him, with a letter that ordered him to return to Rome at once under penalty of disgrace.

Poggibonsi was not Roman territory, and, finding himself back in his native Tuscany, the fugitive felt safe. He replied to the pontiff that he would never return, that his good and faithful service did not deserve so wretched a recompense, and that for this reason he wanted nothing further to do with the tomb nor to

commit himself to anything else. The reply went further than he had intended, because there was marble for the tomb in Florence as well as in Rome, and he had always thought of working a little in one city, a little in the other. Now, in the clash with the Pope, he found a pretext for surreptitiously putting his plans into effect.

The anger of the volcanic pontiff was unbridled. He sent three briefs to the Signoria in Florence, one after the other, each more threatening, announcing terrible reprisals if they did not send back the artist, either willingly or by force. Michelangelo found his nerves relaxing already and his spirit becoming more serene in the pleasant and cordial atmosphere of his own city. He again took up the cartoon and finished it. He wrote conciliatingly to his friend Sangallo that he had no intention of disobeying the Pope—and would he mention this to His Holiness?—but he already had a great many blocks of marble in Florence, he would have others brought to him from Rome, and in the shadow of the great cupola, more peacefully and less expensively, he could continue the promised work, sending from time to time to Rome the finished statues. The Pope would be just as well satisfied because he would undertake—in fact, he was sure of producing—a work “that would not have its equal in the whole world.” But he would not return to Rome.

Pier Soderini, too, was glad to have his great artist back again, for he hoped to have from him new works of art for Florence, and the Battle of Cascina could now be transferred from the cartoon to the fresco in the Grand Council Hall. But he was disturbed by the repeated threats from the fiery Pope, who had already formed an army, conquered Perugia, and was marching on to new battles in Romagna. He tried to bring the intractable artist to a more conciliatory frame of mind, and told him that he would provide him with letters and would have him accompanied by his brother, the Cardinal; in short, that he would send him back not as a penitent but as an ambassador of the Republic—and the person of an ambassador is inviolable. The Pope's letters, too, were becoming more conciliatory.

“You, Michelangelo,” said Pier Soderini, “have treated the

Pope in a way that the King of France would not have dared to do. You should no longer insist upon being entreated to return. We cannot risk a war because of you."

Invitations and greetings had arrived for Michelangelo from the Sultan, who wanted him to build a bridge between Constantinople and Pera. Some Franciscan monks had brought him the Sultan's offer and urged him to accept. A messenger from the Sultan had come to meet him at Ragusa to conduct him with all honors to Constantinople, and a large sum of money had been placed at his disposal at the Gondi bank in Florence. So he replied to the Gonfalonier that he would sooner go to Turkey than return.

However, indignation and anger die down in time; injured feelings are soothed by affection and gentleness, the wound is healed. Pier Soderini spoke persuasive words: "A Christian like him work for a Turk? A thousand times better to die in Rome than to live in Turkey. . . ." In the meantime Julius II had come closer to Florence. After Perugia, he had conquered Bologna, where he was now established. Bologna was not Rome, there were none of Bramante's cutthroats in Bologna, and the victorious Pope would surely not be vindictive. Michelangelo went to pay his respects to His Holiness in his temporary see.

Pier Soderini knew his man and recommended him to the Cardinal of Volterra, writing that if handled properly Michelangelo would do anything that was asked of him. "His nature is such that with gentle words and kindness, if these are given him, he will do all that one desires; one must show him love and treat him kindly, and he will do things that will make all who see them marvel."

CHAPTER VIII

☛ THE HAUGHTY SPIRIT of man often goes hand in hand with a lack of physical courage. The naturally brave of spirit who face combat unflinchingly, who, in fact, often seek it out

and confront it fearlessly, are often prisoners of a nervous system quick to feel fear and suddenly, humbly, they yield to apprehensions.

Morally inflexible though he was, Michelangelo was not always master of his nerves. Pride and indignation gave him boldness; fear cowed him. Strong against the enemies of his art and ready to defend it fiercely, he became weak and timid against the mighty of the world. And the fear they inspired in him was always shrouded in hallucinations and unreasoning terror. Leading a solitary life, engrossed in meditation and art, he moved freely through the upper spheres of the spirit, but contact with men made him bristle with suspicions.

So, encouraged by Pier Soderini, reassured by the authority of two Cardinals, he at last went to Bologna toward the end of November, 1506. His intentions were to do as he was asked and, as a faithful servant of the Church, perform an act of submission, place himself again under the Pope's orders, then ask for leave and return to his own work. Surely the Pope could not object to his taking up again the work on the sepulcher. Too much time had already been lost. Two years had gone by since he had finished the Madonna, now in Bruges; he had done nothing but meditate, sketch, excavate a few blocks of marble, and rough them out, but no new work had come forth from his hands. And he had so many ideas in his head that asked to be expressed. Plans for the tomb of Julius II, the great mountain of marble to be placed in St. Peter's, had grown to such proportions in his mind that he could no longer bear their weight and the tumult they caused within him.

Such were his intentions. Instead, he was to stop in Bologna for almost two years. More time lost. These were two years that left no mark whatsoever upon Michelangelo's career.

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Once in Bologna, he did not immediately go to the Pope, who was expecting him. He wanted first to go into San Domenico to see again his angel, his saints—memories of his twenties—

then he went to mass in San Petronio. Some of the Pope's grooms saw him, recognized him, and led him before His Holiness, who was sitting enthroned in the palace of the Sixteen. He had found the escort he was looking for.

Now what would the terrible pontiff, whom he had offended, say to him, what would he do to him, with that air of wrath and that stick always in his hand? Julius II was a giant, and the white beard that he had allowed to grow long on his square face added to his fearsome majesty. But the terrible, victorious pontiff was in a happy frame of mind. He said only with an anger more simulated than felt:

"You were to have come to seek us, and you waited for us to seek you out." Bologna is, in fact, considerably nearer to Florence than Rome.

Michelangelo got down on his knees, asked for forgiveness, apologized for having erred, not through disobedience but through pride, and Julius II, never one to betray amusement, this time smiled. Peace was made. Michelangelo again had the Pope's blessing; he even had more than he had asked for, because that rash man, Cardinal Soderini, brother of the Gonfalonier, wanting to intervene and to give his defense as a lawyer when it was no longer needed, found words of clumsy flattery which were an insult to his client.

"Let Your Holiness overlook his fault, because he erred through ignorance. Painters outside their art are all like this."

To which the Pope indignantly replied: "It is you who insult him as we never should. It is you who are the ignoramus, the villain, not he. Get out of my sight, and a plague on you!"

And he was pushed out by the servants before the papal staff could hit him.

So peace was made in Bologna, and never again would there be war between Julius II and Michelangelo.

The Pope dismissed the artist but ordered him not to leave Bologna, for he would soon receive his orders. The orders were that he make a statue of Julius II for the façade of San Petronio, a statue of bronze made from the cannon of the conquered Bentivoglios.

He had to work quickly and make at least the clay model which was to be three times life size, because Julius II had to return to Rome and before leaving wanted to see himself in effigy. Michelangelo worked quickly. Clay was an obedient substance in hands accustomed to work marble, and before the Pope left he saw the finished statue. There remained a few details about the pose upon which he asked the advice of His Holiness. Would it please His Holiness to hold a book in his left hand?

"What book?" answered the Pope. "I know nothing of letters. Give me a sword."

The right hand, stretched out in a vehement gesture, left the pontiff perplexed. "Does this statue give a blessing or a curse?"

And Michelangelo, who knew what the Pope liked to hear, retorted:

"Holy Father, it threatens the people if they do not behave."

Pleased, Julius II set out again for Rome to pave the way for diplomatic intrigues, new military alliances, new territorial conquests, new subjections and excommunications for recalcitrant cities, and a new general league against Venice with the King of France, with the Emperor of Austria, with Ferdinand the Catholic, all of whom had some city, or piece of land, or port to take away from the great Republic on the Adriatic.

* * *

The years lost to the artist were gloomy and irritating to the man. The work was not to his taste, for he was not able to give free rein to his imagination in modeling an effigy of the Pope, and the city, lazy and pleasure-seeking in its habits, was not best suited to his restless genius.

The Pope had left him enough money. When Michelangelo had asked for an advance with an estimated bill of three thousand ducats, Julius II, to show him that in Rome there was no avarice, retorted that it was not sufficient for expenses and that there would be all the money that was needed. It was, in fact, the people of Bologna who were footing the bill.

The casting of the statue was another worry and burden. He knew how to do everything, but this wasn't in his line. He asked for a bronze founder in Florence, and the Signoria sent him the best one they had on hand, Master Bernardino. But even great masters fail: the casting did not succeed. It had to be done again—more fatigues, more trials, more time lost.

"Know," he wrote his brother, "that I want, more than you desire it, to return soon, because I remain here with very great discomfort and with extreme weariness, and I do nothing but work night and day, and I have endured and still endure so much fatigue that if I had to do another one, I don't believe I could survive it for it has been an enormous undertaking, and if it had been in the hands of another, we should have fared but ill with it.

"But I think that the prayers of someone helped me and kept me in health, because all Bologna was of the opinion that I should never finish it. It was cast even sooner than had been thought possible, for no one thought that I would ever cast it."

He was torn with a desire to return to Florence. He put off his return from month to month until the spring of the following year, which was 1508. The statue had to be polished, cleaned, put in place. Pestilence was spreading in the city and, even more than pestilence, troubles were brewing. To all this was added unbearable heat such as no living being could remember. The Pope left in charge his legate, the Cardinal of San Vitale, who, chiefly concerned with extorting money, aroused ill will and rebellion. The Pope recalled him to Rome and replaced him by the Cardinal of Pavia, Francesco Alidosi, who was equally fraudulent and more vindictive. The Bentivoglios, exiled in Milan, were trying to return to their city and to boot out the Marescotti, who had supplanted them. The populace was in turmoil, palaces were set on fire, mutilated heads rolled in the streets. The city that had once been so gay and carefree had become dreary and unsafe.

And finally there was the hostility of the artists. In Florence and in Rome he was envied but also feared and respected;

in Bologna he was looked upon only as an intriguer. Ten years earlier he had stolen from the local artists an order for three statues—not very large ones, to be sure—for their church; now he was defying them with a gigantic statue. And that statue was for the glorification of the Pope, the Pope who had fought and beaten them. In Rome he was not liked because of his rudeness and his biting tongue; in Bologna he was hated. The leading Bolognese artist in those days was Francesco Raibolini, and the Florentine not only did not know how to make friends with him but in fact disliked him intensely and spontaneously. Francia was a great friend of Perugino's, that high-living painter whom Michelangelo hated more than any of his colleagues.

This Francesco Raibolini was not an ill-natured man; he was, in fact, rather easygoing, but he was almost sixty, and it is rather difficult at sixty to admit to being surpassed by the young. And, besides, he was distressed by the misfortunes of the Bentivoglios, who were, after all, his masters and who had given him so much work and had paid him so well. Now he was obliged to kneel before this bellicose Pope who had driven them out, and coin medals on which the Pope's head appeared. At least he did not have to bow to the Pope's sculptor, but he did visit Michelangelo in his studio and admired the great statue. He was overheard praising the purity of the metal. Was it ingenuousness or malice? The Florentine was ready with his answer: "If the bronze is good," he said, "I am grateful for it to the Pope who gave it to me as you are grateful to the color men who sell you paints."

Perhaps it was nothing more than a trite and not very witty invention of followers and flatterers. No wittier, but at least gay and more pungent, is another gibe that Michelangelo cast at his adversary. One day, meeting Raibolini's son, a handsome lad, he patted him on the back and said admiringly that his father was rather more successful with living figures than with painted ones.

These skirmishes, which to a certain extent he provoked, no doubt irritated him but they also helped to keep his com-

bative spirit on the alert. And they amused him, as when a wag, trying to be witty, asked him if a team of oxen was bigger than his big statue. "It depends," he answered, "which oxen you mean. If you mean the Bolognese, oh, without a doubt they are bigger, but ours, in Florence, are much smaller."

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The great statue was put in place above the central door of the Duomo and unveiled on the twenty-first of March, 1508. It was the biggest statue that Michelangelo ever made. The left hand held neither a book nor a sword; the sculptor had preferred to place in its hand the keys of St. Peter.

It was an occasion of memorable solemnity. Again threatening clouds were menacing the Vatican, especially from France, where Louis XII was preparing a Council of Cardinals who would depose Julius II and elect in his stead a Pope who would be submissive to him. But on that day there was much gaiety in Bologna, with feasting, dancing in the street, illuminations, and fireworks.

Less than three years later that same people, passing from feasting to fury, hurled down the bronze statue, shattering it in the public square, destroying it as they would have liked to destroy the man it portrayed, and melted down the remains to cast again the cannon from which the statue was originally made. Only the head was saved and the Duke of Este took that with him to Ferrara. It finally disappeared, and the statue of Julius II, like so many other of Michelangelo's works, was swallowed up by time.

CHAPTER IX

20 MICHELANGELO returned to Florence, hoping to remain there. He enjoyed traveling, for he liked to see the world, but where else could he rest as well as in his own city? After the thankless Bolognese task Michelangelo felt the need of lifting his spirits in work of less limited scope, and it may be that the

proposal made by Pier Soderini, who thought of raising another giant statue at the top of the stairs of the Palazzo Vecchio, opposite the David, appealed to him. One of the biggest blocks of marble dug out of Carrara and still lying on the shore would do. But Julius II was trumpeting angrily in Rome, and he had no choice but to go. When he got there he found his house looted and many of his marbles in fragments—the doing, he thought, of Bramante.

The decoration of the Sistine Chapel had become the pontiff's obsession. The poison distilled by Bramante had penetrated deeply into his troubled and fanatic soul; there was time for his tomb, but now it was urgent that the work be completed in the Chapel, which his predecessor and relative, Sixtus IV, had built. The walls had already been painted by Pinturicchio, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio: old things now out of date, that Julius II already thought of doing over as he was having ancient and admirable frescoes by Cimabue, Giotto, Cavallini, and Masolino painted over with works of his own artists. The vault, however, still bare, awaited someone to decorate it. The Pope had entrusted the *Stanze* to the young painter from Urbino, summoned to Rome by his compatriot and distant relative, Bramante, and now Raphael was working in the Signature Room. The Chapel was reserved for Michelangelo. Did Bramante think that the painting of Buonarrotti, sculptor, would be eclipsed by Raphael's? Perhaps he assumed that the Florentine, with his invincible love of stone, would become a formidable rival in architecture. As a painter he was not to be feared. He could not know that Michelangelo would reveal himself in that work as painter, sculptor, and architect, all in one.

Michelangelo, in an effort to parry Bramante's thrust, resorted to a clever argument that would flatter his two rivals. Raphael was doing so well in the Signature Room; it was his medium, so let His Holiness also entrust to Raphael the Sistine Chapel and leave him to stone, which was his medium. But the Pope was obstinate, and against the obstinacy of Julius II there was nothing to be done.

Michelangelo felt mortified. He feared that he would prove

unequal to the task and betray his name and the expectations of the Pope. He could see the disillusionment of his friends, the jubilation of his enemies, and his own irreparable ignominy. The thought of being torn, by flattery and violence, from the tools that suited him best, from his marble blocks excavated with such love from Carrara, from that world of statues, Madonnas, angels, saints, patriarchs, and allegorical groups which, during three years of meditation, had acquired so much substance in his mind, caused him a deep and undeserved anguish which he felt shackled his genius. He despaired of his talent, of his future, of his fortune. Happily, Giuliano da Sangallo, his guardian angel, who knew how to give him courage and restore his faith and serenity, was there. The old friend knew, from confidences that Michelangelo made to him, that he understood only one genre of painting—that of the ancient art of the fresco. For Michelangelo an oil painting could be no more than a decoration, done as a pastime—Flemish art, women's art—while in a fresco the genius of an artist expands and finds expression. He himself, after painting the Holy Family for Angelo Doni, had done little or nothing in oils and had left other paintings unfinished, whereas he had eagerly set to work on the cartoon of the Battle of Cascina which was to have become the fresco in the Grand Council Hall. Very well, then, let him start work, with the will to do better than the others, the work desired by the Pope, who appreciated him more than all the others, suggested Sangallo, and again he would create something that would confound enemies and rivals alike.

Michelangelo entered the Chapel, and the inevitable happened. The consecrated fury of creation conquered him, kept him in perpetual agitation. Setting to work, he became the slave, the prey of his genius. He entered the Chapel in obedience to the Pope, with the intention of painting frescoes, according to the Pope's wishes, in the center of the vault, which he would fill in a few months with Biblical scenes. But when he found himself alone, small, suspended there in the solemn room, with that great white vault over his head, the Chapel rose and ex-

panded infinitely, became the universe. The figures that were emerging tumultuously from his mind multiplied, regrouped themselves, composed themselves in a fantastic harmony, building up a whole mystic world on that high and boundless sky. He told the Pope that he would paint not only the center of the vault but the entire ceiling up to the large windows. He had work before him for many years; the Chapel would be his prison. He set to work, worried, reluctant, torn between the state of mind of a child alarmed at the task before him and the determination to see it through to the end.

Two incidents happened the first day, one of which served to bolster him up, the other to discourage him from continuing. The construction of the wooden platform under the vault that was to support the artist and his assistants had been entrusted to the architect Bramante, who had been unable to do better than to suspend the platform by means of thick ropes that ran through large holes pierced in the ceiling and were fastened to the roof. How was the artist to deal with those holes—how was he to fill them up and paint them?

Michelangelo lost no time denouncing the error to the Pope, showing him a very simple manner of doing it differently and better. "It can be figured out later," said Bramante, but Michelangelo wanted it figured out at once. He took down the suspended platform, blocked up the holes, and recovered sufficient cordage to make a present of it to the carpenter, who, by selling it, was able to pay his daughter's dowry. Then he constructed a high movable bridge that he reached by ladder, a method adopted afterwards by all painters.

The other incident almost made him lose courage. He had been painting for a short time when he noticed that the colors were molding. He betook himself, humble and imploring, to Julius II. Did not the Holy Father see that this was not his medium? He had always told him so; let him be excused from this task then . . . This was the surest way of strengthening the Pope's determination to make Michelangelo continue, and thanks to his obstinacy, the world acquired a masterpiece. Julius

sent Sangallo to look into the matter and to calm the worried artist. Sangallo, in his kindness, again came to Michelangelo's assistance. He knew that the colors were getting moldy only because they were painted on travertine plaster that was too damp. If less water were used there would be no more mold. Michelangelo went back to his scaffold and his work.

He preferred to work by himself. He did not want even a boy to mix his colors for him. Often he did not go out in the evening, not even to go home. At mealtimes he let in the servant, who had to climb high to bring him bread and a bowl of soup. When he was overcome by weariness he slept in his clothes with his boots on. He rested his arms and his eyes by meditating or by writing verse, some of it in a comic vein. It was a method of working that would have deformed or crippled a man who did not have the muscles and the nerves with which Michelangelo was blessed. He lay flat on his back, day after day, month after month, year after year, his eyes and beard lifted toward heaven, his neck contracted, his stomach pushing against his spine. When, after four years, he finished the work and came out of his prison, he had almost lost his sight and walked with his head back, looking up.

Only Julius II was admitted to the Chapel. When the Pope's steps and the hammering of his staff could be heard on the tiles, Michelangelo would come down and let him in, helping him up the ladder and showing him what he did not let anyone else see. And he continued to work. From up there, in contact with the details of those immeasurable figures, a hand, a knee, a jutting chin, a burning look, the Pope could see and understand little of the artist's conception, but he understood that it was great and he liked to see that savage man at work. They also exchanged the usual gossip that is permissible even between a Pope and a painter. Michelangelo listened and spoke little. The Pope urged him to hasten the work, for the years of his papacy were passing. There were the usual proddings and Michelangelo's usual retort: "As soon as I can, Holy Father."

One day the explosive Pope struck him with his staff:

“ ‘As soon as I can, as soon as I can’ . . . and you shan’t go to Florence.”

Michelangelo had asked for leave to go celebrate the Feast of St. John with his family. The Pope refused him the money for the trip. The flight of the year 1506 threatened to be repeated. Michelangelo returned to his house, packed his belongings, and was on the point of taking the post when Accursio, the Pope’s favorite, arrived with five hundred ducats and the papal apologies. Michelangelo accepted the money and the apologies and went to Florence.

He returned to Rome to take up the work but had to interrupt it for he needed money. The Pope was crossing Italy at the head of his troops, assaulting fortresses that persisted in resisting him and defying kings who claimed the right to cross his path. Michelangelo went to join him in Bologna to get the allowance which, in the Pope’s absence, the administration of the Vatican refused him.

There were no other pauses in his work, no other escapes from the prison of the scaffold. Michelangelo said that Art wanted a man entirely to herself, leaving him free for no other pastimes, his own or that of others. Nor did he concede anything to these pleasures which the world offered so bountifully.

He used to say that whoever possesses a talent for drawing possesses a great treasure: he can make figures so great that no limits can encompass them. He made the vast space of the Chapel immense, so that it might contain the towers and the mountains of his heroic figures.

He also used to say that painting was none other than a copy of the perfection of God, a recollection of divine painting, a music and a melody that only the intellect can perceive without difficulty; and he applied his intellect and his soul to listening to the mysterious symphony of the creation of the world, orchestrated in sacred books, to realizing it in a great configuration of form, color, and movement.

He brought to the Chapel of Pope Sixtus his nostalgia and the lament for the tomb of Pope Julius which had grown in his

imagination only to remain there, powerful and compressed. The mountain of white marble as yet unrealized was transformed here into a mountain of colored figures. Bodies of athletes and adolescents, plastic allegories, were plucked from that idea and enthroned here. The nude youths which adorn the cornice of the construction supporting the arches were derived from the decorative conception of the mausoleum.

The work absorbed him completely, isolating him from the anxieties and the pleasures of life and depriving him of the friendship of men and the love of women; it kindled in his mind the fire of divine madness. Before he began he had been intimidated and almost defeated by the grandeur of the idea to be realized, and he undertook the task, if not against his better judgment, at least with uneasiness. In the end he felt that the figures that he drew from his imagination and thoughts could move here with greater freedom than in the stone that would have enchained them. He was grieved not to be able to wield chisel and mallet, but in the end the brushes became in his hands as chisel and mallet. And the plaster drying was akin to hard stone. He did not paint his figures; he carved them, projected them, sculptured them, and those figures stood out in high relief, reached forward, either fixed on their pedestals or free to move in space. They were not placed like actors on a stage, grouped and harmonized for the visual pleasure of the artist, but whirled about, moved by a superhuman breath of life. It was not he who snatched them from the prenatal silence: he did not pluck them from limbo, these creatures who looked wonderingly at their creator. It was they who came to him, circling around him, talking to him, exciting and terrifying him. And amidst these giants he felt himself growing to their stature.

He held awesome colloquies with them. The Prophets, the Sybils, Adam, Eve, Noah, the victims of the Deluge, Hebrews attacked by serpents that twisted around them, the forebears of Jesus, the nameless youths, the great and terrible God, Creator of light and darkness, emerged from the arcane terror of the Old Testament, from the mysterious travail of Genesis, spoke

to him a language that no one ever understood. And no one, perhaps ever, suffered with so burning a compassion the mystery of the beginning and the end of mankind.

When the Pope left Rome on his numerous expeditions the artist had no other human visage before him. The noisy and quarrelsome voices of the city did not reach to his platform. He lived in the absolute immobility of silence, of time stopped in its flight. Alone, his thoughts, his ideas, those already expressed and those still to be expressed, kept him company. Those super-human faces, those foreheads that contained mighty thoughts, surrounded him and welcomed him in their legendary assemblies. Sometimes he put down his brushes to grind his colors. He relaxed a little by doing pen and ink drawings of foreshortened muscles, or one of those beautiful spiritual heads of women contained within the purity of few lines, which were his magic. He closed his eyes, which burned with the intensity of looking at the tip of his paint brush, but he did not sleep. These were endless days and sleepless nights. He used to light a small lantern which, as he moved, multiplied the forms and shadows in the fantastic world about him.

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Julius II was impatient to see the great work completed. Upon his return to Rome after every new expedition he hoped to see the Chapel opened, and every time instead he had to knock with his staff on the closed door, climb up the long ladder to the platform, and up there find himself face to face with those enormous figures which, since he was too near to see them in their light and perspective, appeared to him rather misshapen. Disturbed by the adversities, plots, and defeats of his daily struggle, he rested his tormented thoughts in this great work which would confer splendor upon his reign. It was said that he understood little of art, and he himself did not bother to deny it, but it was not true for he understood Michelangelo's genius better than any other contemporary.

By mid-September of 1510 half of the Sistine Chapel was

finished, and to please the Pope Michelangelo uncovered that half. What Pope Julius had expected to satisfy his pride happened. People from everywhere—artists, poets, cardinals—came running. All knew of this young sculptor, rough, rebellious, misanthropic, come from Florence, who had immediately fallen into the good graces of the warring Pope; who had already sculptured the most beautiful statues to be seen, and who now for more than two years had been painting in the Vatican. They knew that he had a great name: Michelangelo, a name wrapped in a shroud of mystery, and in that name they sensed an art as great as his name. But few knew the man; no one had seen him in the usual meeting places and assemblies: gardens filled with ladies and cavaliers who spoke Latin, carnival processions, banquets, churches crowded with courtesans; and those who saw him go through the streets in the company of his servant, or more often alone, pointed out to each other a man of medium stature, carelessly dressed, absorbed, hurrying, as though perpetually hunted.

The general admiration was mixed with astonishment and fright. Something unusual, strange, powerful, and also a little shocking was seen. On that vault there was no gentle grace of color that attracted, but a power of design and a depth of thought that were disconcerting.

Bramante, the old enemy, knew then that he had lost the game. He had hoped to work for the ruin of his young rival, and he had instead worked for his new glory. This Florentine who could wield with equal skill the chisel and the brush was in the way. He would have to be removed. Bramante suggested to the Pope that the other half of the Chapel be entrusted to Raphael; in that way he would put in competition the two greatest artists of the time, all to the glory of the papacy and the triumph of art. It was then that Michelangelo showed that he could use his tongue as well as the chisel and brush. After so many years of silence, or at most of critical murmuring, he gave vent to his feelings openly. In the presence of the Pope he told Bramante all that he had to tell him: how badly he was spending

the money for the construction of St. Peter's, and how wicked it was to demolish the columns of the ancient temple, which were irreplaceable pieces of architecture . . . wanton destruction!

The combative spirit of the Pope must have enjoyed this passage at arms. Perhaps Bramante's idea would have appealed to him, had he not understood—and certainly Bramante understood it, although he gave no indication of it—that a work of art cannot, without disharmony, be done half by one painter, in one manner, and finished in a different manner by another painter. Julius II told Michelangelo to continue, and Michelangelo went back to work.

Bramante remained his architect, but Buonarrotti was now his man.

CHAPTER X

LEAVING THE CHAPEL, Michelangelo sometimes met Raphael as he left the *Stanze* followed by a cortege of pupils and helpers. He was only twenty-five years old, and the pupils who followed him were of the same age or older. They sought him, praised him, admired him, exalted him. They contended for his favors, his attention, his smiles. His retinue in Rome numbered about fifty and included many women, both of humble and of noble birth. The mistresses of princes, cardinals, bankers, were also his mistresses. He was handsome, gentle, and amiable. Around him also, as around princes and cardinals and bankers, a court gathered. Bramante had built him a palace near the Vatican, and there he lived, as in a royal palace, loved and adulated.

Michelangelo had unearthed a small house as far from the Vatican as was possible, beyond Trajan's Forum, in a street called Macel dei Corvi. It was a small house with a garden, in which pomegranates grew in June, and with some uncultivated ground in which to assemble the blocks of marble for the Pope's tomb. His only luxury was a horse, which he rode for relaxa-

tion. He liked to go out at dusk in the countryside surrounding the city and, more often, in the starry night. He was sometimes accompanied by his servant.

Raphael worked quickly. He painted in the *Stanze* scenes of the military life of Pope Julius, transfiguring them in the telling into old episodes of papal and Christian victories. He portrayed the Pope, he portrayed men alive and dead, he portrayed himself. It never crossed Michelangelo's mind to do anything similar, even when he might again work on the Pope's tomb. There was no shadow of flattery or concession to the taste and wishes of others in the mighty figures that he went on painting in the vault of the Chapel. He painted only the world of his fantasies, because outside that world he did not live, and those great figures that had a name, sacred or legendary, were nothing but the projection and personification of the thoughts that rioted within him. He painted no one's portrait, either living or dead, not even those he loved and venerated, because ephemeral man remained a stranger to the tragic world of his thoughts.

Julius II admired him nonetheless for it, and loved him, but he also feared him. He feared him as a man and as an artist. At about that time a young painter named Sebastiano Luciani was summoned to Rome from Venice by Alessandro Chigi. Contrary to fashion, Luciani as a painter came closer to Michelangelo than to Raphael. The Pope, who had taken him under his wing and entrusted some work to him, advised him: "Look at the work of Raphael, who, when he saw Michelangelo's style, immediately dropped Perugino's and approached Michelangelo's as much as he could; but he is terrible, as you see; it is not possible to work with him."

Now that terrible painter, when he left the big Chapel to go back to his small house in the Macel dei Corvi, became a little man lost in the disorder and vanity of a society that thought it was achieving refinement by decking itself in a rhetoric it dubbed poetry and in an urbanity it regarded as civilization. He found himself again in the small, mediocre, and irritating world of daily vexations, of domestic annoyances and worries, of politi-

cal plots and traps, of minute accounts with servants, grocers, caterers, and countless others who asked him for money or owed him some. His spirit, descending from the boundless freedom of the artistic skies, let itself be caught in the thorny meshes of material preoccupations. The man who under the vault of the Chapel had spoken familiarly with patriarchs and prophets, who had dared look into the eyes of the Eternal, became timid, exasperated, inept in the face of the adversities of daily life.

A good-for-nothing servant who ate his bread or a tradesman who tried to short-change him pained him more than the outbursts of the Pope or the malice of rivals. A loan of forty ducats which Luca Signorelli asked him for and did not think to repay made him lose sleep. When he needed another servant, his father sent him a lad from Florence who wanted to do everything except serve, who wanted, rather, to be the master and have Michelangelo wait on him. Fear of losing the money that he went to deposit in the bank kept him in a perpetual state of agitation and he lived on little, but he was apprehensive for his family and for his old age. He was only thirty-five years old, he was strong, he worked vigorously, but the thoughts of old age and death were already present.

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The thought of his father who was growing old worried him, and of his brothers who had no talent and few resources. Even though he scourged them in his letters he would have stripped himself of everything for them. When his brothers did come to visit him, he sent them to sleep at the inn, but when he found himself alone he worried about them.

He continued to send most of his earnings to his father, so that he could deposit them in the Spedalengo bank of Santa Maria Novella. He had in Rome a credit of six thousand ducats, but although he needed the money for himself, for his work and the workers, he did not touch it. He skimped, he asked money of the Pope, but he did not touch the six thousand ducats. He had already sent more than that to Florence, and only asked his

father and Buonarotto not to speak of it to a living soul, and to both he always recommended that they go to the bank in twos and threes for fear of thieves. Above all, that money was to serve for the purchase of houses and land, and he wanted his father and Buonarotto to search all titles carefully and to inform him of every transaction, to make sure that the houses were solidly built, well situated, free of mortgages, with fertile land, and far from the Arno which is a treacherous river.

His father could dispose of that money as he saw fit, live as a lord, as he had been born, and deprive himself of nothing. "Take it as you need it, and if you need more, take what you need, for whatever you need I shall give you. . . . Do not be dismayed, and do not give yourselves an ounce of worry, because even if material things are lost, life itself is not lost. I shall more than make it up to you, so that you will have more than what you will lose; but remember that you must not attach too much importance to worldly goods because they are ephemeral. Take care of yourselves and sooner let things go than suffer discomfort, for I hold you dear, alive and poor. If you die I should not care to have all the gold in the world. . . ."

Because of these purchases of houses and farms, it was easy to become involved in lawsuits and litigations, and the good son begged his father not to be distressed by them. "Do it without passion, because no undertaking is so great that it does not appear small if it be done dispassionately. Never mind the expense; when there is nothing left to spend, God will help us." The man who counted ducats and pennies valued money only for what it was worth against adversity, illness, or inability to work. When Buonarotto announced that he was going to marry, Michelangelo exhorted him not to look for a rich wife, but for a woman of integrity and nobility of character, because "avarice is a very great sin, and nothing which is sinful can have a good end." And he always kept a thousand ducats at his brother's disposal so that he might leave the Strozzi's shop and, together with Gian Simone, set up his own.

To be sure, he was not always patient and amiable, but

his brothers conducted themselves in such a way as to make him lose patience. Besides the money that he spent on them in a continuous stream, they managed to extract more from him underhandedly. They had become accustomed to an easy way of life and came to regard it as their right. It was then that their hard-working brother rebelled: "I should like to know, from your ingratitude, what money you are speaking of and where you earned it; the other thing I should like to know is, are you keeping count of those 228 ducats that you took from the bank of Santa Maria Novella, and of many other hundreds that I spent for the house and for you, and of the discomforts and privations that I have endured in order to help you. I should like to know if you take them into account. If you had enough sense to know the truth, you would not say: I have spent so much of my own. And also you would not have come here to bother me with your affairs, seeing how I have always behaved toward you in the past; rather you should have said: Michelangelo knows what he has written us, and if he does not do as he said he would it must be because of some reason that we do not know about; let us be patient, because it is not good to spur the horse that runs as fast, and faster than he can. But you have never known me and do not yet know me. May God forgive you!"

With his father he was considerably more obedient and indulgent, thoughtful, and humble:

"I want to assure you that all the labors that I have endured have been as much for you as for myself, and what I have bought I have bought to be yours so long as you live; that if you had not been alive, I should not have bought it. Therefore, when you wish to rent the house and farm, do so at your pleasure; and with that income and with what I shall give you, you will live like a lord. . . ." The old autocrat persisted in keeping his son under his thumb, although the latter had been working and earning for several years, had sculptured the David, and was a man famous throughout Italy. He deluged him with fatherly rebukes, and the son, fearing the reproofs, sought to anticipate and avoid them. Lodovico had complained because of two use-

less attendants his son had sent back from Bologna. And Michelangelo had humbly apologized: "I am anxious that you reprove me, because I deserve to be reproved, for I am sorry and sinful as the others and perhaps more so."

Lodovico never understood the greatness of his extraordinary child. Old age finally undermined his senses, and within a few years he was to go about saying that Michelangelo had thrown him out or wanted to throw him out of his house. The latter, resentful but compassionate, wrote him: "I am sure that never from the day I was born was it in my mind to do anything either small or large against you, and all the fatigues I have borne I have borne for your sake; and since I returned from Rome to Florence, know that I have always taken your part and know that I have given you all that I have. It is not so long since I promised you that I would never fail you and that I should be a comfort to you as long as I shall live, and this I repeat and affirm. Now I marvel that you have forgotten everything so soon. Yet you have tried me for thirty years, you and your sons, and you know that I have always wanted your welfare and I have done as much for you as I was able. . . ."

But the day came when the loyal son could no longer bear the unjust paternal criticisms and rebelled. The father considered himself robbed because he could not take out of the bank the money deposited by Michelangelo because of a certain clause in the contract which had been suggested by some practical people to prevent his brothers from taking possession of it so long as their father lived. And Michelangelo, after having explained the clause to his father, bitterly complained: "I have made clear the contract to you, that is, that you may break it if you see fit, since you do not like it. I have explained that this deposit is at your disposition; I have always done and undone as you wished. I no longer know what you want from me. If my life is a burden to you, you have found a way of getting rid of me and of getting back the key of the treasure which you say I have, and it will be to your advantage, for all Florence knows that you were rich and that I have always robbed you

and that I deserve punishment. You will be much praised. Unburden yourself and tell me what you will, but don't write to me any more, for you keep me from my work. I must still discount what you have had from me for the last twenty-five years. I should rather not tell you; I cannot help myself. Guard yourself well against those of whom you should be careful: one dies but once and one does not return to mend things badly done. You are temporizing with death in acting this way. God help you!"

But this was sadness, not rancor. His father was ill and suffered from a persecution mania. His dutiful son then repented the bitter words and was consumed by the wish to see his father again, especially as he thought him to be in want. His filial piety, grown with the years, found renewed strength in religion. The family, the city of his forebears, exercised upon his spirit the attraction of painful things. He always wanted to run back to Florence, though he knew that he would suffer there, that he would immediately leave, but it was a desire he could not banish from his heart. In order to celebrate the Feast of St. John with his family every year, he granted himself a week of rest. When he saw that the Chapel would soon be completed he wrote to his father and to Buonarrotto that they could expect him from week to week, and he put off his departure only because that immense work always seemed to be but never was completed.

Turbulent days for Florence and all of Tuscany followed. Between the tottering Republic, the Medici who were regaining strength, Louis XII threatening with his council meeting in Pisa to overthrow the Pope, and Julius II hated by the King and the Republic who saw in him a protector of the Medici, the peace and prosperity of the Florentines had come to an end. The sack of Prato was the first of the storms that were unleashed on Italy after a period of quiet that had been no more than a pause, and the sack of Prato was followed by the return of the Medici to Florence, accompanied by their hangers-on, and by a succession of revenges. Then came the ill-fated conspiracy of Pier Paolo Boscoli.

At the first sign of trouble Michelangelo wrote to his brother and father to take as much money as they could out of the bank and retire to Siena, a peaceful land, where he would take a house for them and join them later. He begged them above all not to become mixed up in political matters, either by deed or by word, "and to do as is done with pestilence, be the first to flee." He was not in the favor of the Medici, nor had he been favored by them after the death of his first protector, Lorenzo. There was still in the Medici family some who held him in the high esteem that was his due. He had had some dealings with Giuliano, Lorenzo's youngest son; but they were superficial relations without real sentiment. In the gay court of artists that gathered around Cardinal Giovanni in the Palazzo Madama, which Lorenzo's second son had had built for himself not long before, the severe and reproving face of the sculptor never appeared. He had loved the Republic of Savonarola and Pier Soderini too much to accept the lordship of the Medici, who, even when exiled, gave the impression that they intended to establish a dynasty.

When that lordship was again an accomplished fact, he was shaken and disturbed by it. Rumor ran in Florence that he had publicly spoken ill of the Medici, and his father advised him to be on his guard. He neither confirmed nor denied it. He replied that, after the sack of Prato, even the stones, had they been able to speak, would have protested, and certainly he, who was not a stone, openly said what he thought. But for his father and brothers it was another story, and he begged them to seal their lips. They suffered annoyances, were weighed down with taxes; he begged them to be patient, and to pay what was demanded—pay, be it understood, with his money—" . . . and if you cannot have honors in this world like other citizens, let it suffice you to have bread and to live in Christ, and poorly as I do here; for I live wretchedly and do not care about honors, that is, worldly honors, and I live in great hardship and in the midst of a thousand suspicions. . . ." But he wrote a letter to Giuliano, and thus his father and brother were returned to favor. Indeed, Buonarrotto,

shortly after, was given a public post and was made a Palatine count by Pope Leo X, son of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

This was a typical contrast in the man whose strength lay in thought and yet who allowed himself to be weakened in action by scruples and fears. This duality, which is the very essence of great artists, created in Michelangelo two personalities distinct and separate, in whom the stronger did not know how to dominate the weaker, nor guide it and counsel it. The man who lived entirely in the tragic world of his imagination, whose every passion was lit by that heroic flame, in the world of mediocre realities became entangled in an anxiety without end. It was not exactly indifference, but rather a disgust and annoyance. He did not know how to adapt himself to reality but, not knowing how to face it, yielded to circumstances as he would have yielded to pain, deserved or undeserved, but disapprovingly, in order to free himself.

CHAPTER XI

20 THERE WAS a point of spiritual dissimilarity between the artist and the pontiff who were alike in so many other ways. Michelangelo had a much more religious turn of mind than Julius II, and had over the Pope all the superiority which eternal art has over ephemeral power.

Pope Julius gave to temporal power, to earthly things, more importance than Michelangelo did. However, the Pope had an ardent love for Italy even though his attention was concentrated chiefly on the Papal States, identified by him with Italy, whereas in Michelangelo that love seemed, though in reality it was not, rather weak. The years of his papacy were not many—not quite ten—but it was a battle from first to last, a battle against all who opposed the greatness of the papacy or who hindered it; the French and the Emperor, Venice and Florence. And, old as he was and armed only with his staff, he always wanted to battle in person against the opposing armies, cities, and fortresses. He

returned to Bologna when the Bolognese herd showed signs of revolt, and he had the satisfaction of seeing himself in bronze on the façade of San Petronio. At the siege of Mirandola he was the first over the walls and ditches, while houses collapsed under enemy bombardment all around him.

The cardinals could not be content with a head who, wanting to live dangerously, imperiled everyone. Against the Council of Pisa, which did not have the power to depose him, he was able to assemble a stronger one in Rome, in the Lateran, but the sole fact that a schismatic council was possible was a sign of the discontent and the disobedience already rife in the clergy.

More openly discontented were the people of Rome, who were accustomed to festivals and whom the Pope wanted to accustom to war; who asked for milk and honey and received firearms. One day, toward the end of 1511, Julius II fell gravely ill; it seemed as though rough usage and suffering had undermined his strong body, and the rumor spread that he was dying. There was jubilation among the citizenry, and the rabble met on the Campodoglio to decree the end of the pontifical government.

But he did not die. He returned to the attack with renewed energy. Enemy number one to be beaten was now the King of France and after him the Florentines who were abetting him. He had the happy idea of a war cry that sounded the national rally: "Out with the barbarians!" But against the French barbarians he sent Spanish barbarians and suffered Pisa, which was an Italian city, to be put to the sack. However, his obsession and ambition was to see "Italy for the Italians," and that war cry crowned with glory and legend the last year of his tempestuous reign.

* * *

Every time he returned to Rome he hoped to see the Chapel completed. He considered the grave malady from which he had escaped a warning from heaven, and toward the autumn of the following year, being ready for new undertakings and fearing perhaps that he might not return, he lost patience. Michelangelo had given him his usual answer, which had become a friendly

joke, but it made the explosive Pope lose all self-control. "When I can, Holy Father," and the Holy Father threatened to have him thrown from the scaffold. It was his customary way of threatening. Not long before he wanted to throw Ludovico Ariosto, innocent ambassador of the Duke of Este, into the Tiber.

Michelangelo then ordered the scaffolding to be taken down, and for the great Feast of All Saints he uncovered the whole of the fresco. On that day the Pope celebrated a Solemn High Mass. There were greater crowds and more admiration than the first time. A work of art interrupted in the middle, even if it is possible to appreciate the details of workmanship, always leaves one uncertain in judgment and feeling. Now, in its completion, the immense vault of the Chapel was a vision so splendid that it was staggering. All Rome wanted to see the marvelous work. Its fame was spread over the world.

The cartoon of the Battle of Cascina had created a school for beginners, an academy for zealous students of design. Now the fresco of the Sistine Chapel became the goal of artistic pilgrimages, an altar to which painters of every country and of every style came to worship. When the astonishment of the first impression had passed, everyone had something to learn about foreshortening and movement. Everyone sought there the secret of the human and superhuman breath that must animate a work of art. Fellow artists were stunned by the prodigious technique, by the novelty of the art of disposing and grouping the figures, by the plastic quality that detached them from the walls, making them alive and vibrant in the air. They felt that it was not possible to go beyond him, or even to follow him, because his art was inimitable; and yet everyone took to imitating it, and corrupting it in the exaggeration of forms. It was a summit, and summits are always surrounded by abysses. Pope Julius was right: this man was terrible, and frightening.

A last retouching of ultramarine and some last gilt decoration were missing. The Pope noticed it, or perhaps it was Michelangelo who pointed it out, and it became almost a point of honor with him to have the retouching done. But the scaffolding

had to be rebuilt, and the artist had lost the desire to do it. After having lived a life so intense that it absorbed all his time, occupied all his thoughts, banished all distractions, in a world made up of arcane terrors, of tragic visions and confused contemplations, in the company of great and powerful creatures who had become the masters and lords of his being, the tyrants of his every action, a life which enslaved and at the same time freed him, that exhausted and left him almost senseless, he felt the need to tear himself away from it—lest he end by hating it. He had to find work that would soothe his spirit still in tumult, so that his fever would subside and he could be drawn away toward other joys and other sorrows.

“Gold, at least some gold,” Julius II shouted, who thought greatness would be increased by riches. And the artist, who always liked to joke a little with his imperious pontiff, replied:

“I do not see, Holy Father, that men wear gold.”

“It will look poor.”

“Those who are painted there, Holy Father—they too were poor.”

Now he desired the refreshing feel of stone. For four years he had not touched the tools of his trade, and his hands were drawn anew by those tools as by magnets. The great blocks of marble for the Pope’s tomb lay there in his garden to haunt the little sleep he allowed himself. Now he wanted to ask the Pope permission to be left with those blocks, and the Pope finally, against his will, granted it. The reverses of his armies in those last months of the year worried Julius II. The defeat of Ravenna wounded him sorely. On Christmas in 1512 he retired to bed and never rose again. On February 21st of the new year, at the age of seventy, he died.

His great white beard made him look older than he was. Passion for power had burned out that vigorous body.

* * *

Rome felt as though an incubus had been lifted. And yet, following so many fatuous and grasping pontiffs, this fiery

Pope had tried to give to the city a spirit of austerity, a sobriety, and a dignity of life in which he partly succeeded while he lived. He had tried, but he lacked the time and the spirituality to be a reformer, and the Romans were not easy to reform.

Something of what he did and promoted in legislation, education, finance, and especially in art remained. He recalled to discipline and good conduct the religious orders, which had fallen into disrepute. He opposed the institution of the Spanish Inquisition in Naples. He prohibited duels; he granted to Jews greater liberty than they had in other states; missionaries received encouragement and help from him. With a vigilant and strict police he sought, as much as he was able, to make life more secure in a city open to daily robberies and murders. He too practiced nepotism. Born of plebeian stock, he was nonetheless very proud of his great family, already celebrated by his uncle, Sixtus; but simony appeared to him a dreadful leprosy, and he fought it with all his might. He re-established order in the administration, rid the government of parasitic employees so that he left brimful for his successor the treasury coffers, dilapidated by the Borgias and found empty by him—this despite so much fighting and spending for war and art, in the form of great architectural constructions begun and battles lost.

He excommunicated Venice and terrified the ambassadors of that powerful city. Back in their native city, they told wondrous tales of the man whom they described as a kind of giant.

Martin Luther, who visited Rome in 1510, was revolted and appalled by the stench of Roman life, yet he admired the excellent civil regime instituted by Julius II. Historians, even hostile ones like Guicciardini, bowed before him.

BOOK 3

CHAPTER XII: POPE LEO X CHAPTER XIII:
MICHELANGELO AND RAPHAEL CHAPTER
XIV: THE INCOMPLETE CHAPTER XV:
THE RETURN TO FLORENCE CHAPTER
XVI: POPE CLEMENT VII CHAPTER
XVII: MICHELANGELO IN DEFENSE
OF FLORENCE



CHAPTER XII



JULIUS II did not rate Giovanni de' Medici, the Magnificent's eldest living son, one of his favorite cardinals; he was too different and far removed from the Pope's own energetic nature. But in order to punish Florence for having supported the schismatic Council of Pisa, Julius II had ended by protecting the Medici and reinstating them in Florence. He had even tried to make a warrior of the tame Cardinal Giovanni, and had sent him as his legate against Gaston de Foix's army, but the Cardinal Giovanni had been unable to keep out of the hands of the enemy.

In Rome, Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici held the court that Julius II did not hold, and the golden Madama Palace was in sharp contrast to the somber gray of the Vatican. The pontifical tradition of receptions, banquets, and literary meetings, of masquerades and buffooneries, interrupted in the Pope's rooms, continued in those of the Cardinal. Excluded from the presence of Pope Julius, men of letters, parasites, buffoons, court jesters, and the "archfools," as Matteo Bandello who knew what he was talking about called them, gathered about the Cardinal, so that together with his court following and his attendant physician he was already Pope when he entered the conclave.

His only rival was Riario, a candidate in previous conclaves who had always been defeated, as he was to be defeated in this one also. At the first ballot the Medici obtained one vote only, Riario none. But it was a contest of waiting, and the Medici had no doubt about the ultimate results of the voting, for his conclavist, Bernardo Dovizi, Cardinal of Bibbiena, managed so well that in the end the election was unanimous. Cardinal Giovanni, appointed to count the ballot, read his name on every slip without altering in the least either his fat face or his thin voice. He had been carried to the Vatican in a litter because of an aggra-

vated anal fistula that had troubled him since his boyhood days. He was accompanied by a physician and nurses who provided bandages and plasters, and from the litter he passed effortlessly to the throne of St. Peter.

He was still very young: abbot at seven, canon, and then bishop overloaded with benefices; cardinal at twelve, he was Pope at thirty-seven. He was ordained only after becoming Pope. His youth could have been counted against him, but it had not been an obstacle to his election, and in the Vatican there were always means of shortening a life. Obese, myopic, he was truly ugly, with the ugliness of an unhealthy man. He appeared mild, jovial, sociable—qualities that can make attractive even a physically repugnant man. Lorenzo used to say that of his three sons one was wise, one mad, and the other good. Giovanni was the wise one, heavy of body and slight of intellect. Fortune, which had always been good to him, formed an aura of sympathy around his fat person. He was said to be chaste, and he was called the virgin Pope. He joked, he was good-humored and expected good-humor in others; he did not wear himself out (or so it seemed) in serious thought, for he wanted to have a good time, he liked gay people, he spoke little but smiled and laughed all the time. And Rome found it pleasant to have a jolly Pope succeed a surly one.

His father, Lorenzo, had sung with youthful gaiety:

“Youths and maidens enjoy today
Naught ye know about tomorrow!” *

And his son had said slyly, putting his plump hand on his brother Giuliano's shoulder, “And now let us enjoy the power God has given us.”

* * *

Enjoy himself he did, turning his papacy and Rome into a continuous holiday, trying to partition Italy into fiefs for his relatives. And, since the Medici always had representatives and messengers in every city of Italy, the festivals spread afar. The

* Translation by J. A. Symonds.

arches of triumph erected in Rome by bankers, bishops, patri-
cians, and merchants in every road and in every square from
the Vatican to the Lateran, to celebrate his coronation in Rome,
were duplicated in Florence the following year when he wanted
to make his triumphal entry into the city of his forefathers.

He chose for his secretaries the two most illustrious men of
letters of the time then living in Rome, Bembo and Sadoleto,
who attracted hundreds of brainless and fawning followers.
When he went from the Madama Palace to the Vatican, the
nurslings of the Muses multiplied; and whoever was best able to
amuse the Pope with his verses was proclaimed archpoet by him.
Camillo Querno, a ne'er-do-well from Monopoli in Bari became
the archpoet. Poetic compositions were lavishly paid for. The
new Pope was accustomed to receive these homages in Italian
rhyme or in Latin distichs, when at table, and Serapica, his faith-
ful and obsequious little valet and steward, who was as small
and vicious as his mosquito namesake, dispensed the sum pre-
scribed. If he liked the verses a goblet of pure wine was given
with the money; if he did not like them the wine was watered
and the poets drank it all the same, declaring it to be excellent.

But musicians were more to his taste than poets. His his-
torians described him as being a sensitive music critic, and cer-
tainly he enjoyed the pleasing sounds that tickled his gross sen-
sibilities. And he preferred music accompanied by lascivious
dances and dances accompanied by gibes and grimaces. Musi-
cians were more appreciated than poets, buffoons and court fools
more than musicians. A whole dynasty of Cecconi, Cecchetti,
and Ceccoti invaded the Vatican to banish papal boredom.
When Bramante, who had held the office of Chancellor of the
Seal (sealer, that is, of papal briefs and bulls), died, he chose as
his successor a loathsome friar, Fra Mariano, who turned his
position into a gold mine.

Julius II had appointed very few cardinals, not one of
whom came from Rome; in the space of one year Leo X ap-
pointed thirty-one, and in multiplying the number of cardinals,
the courts, the feasts, and the poetic coteries were also multiplied.

On May 1st, at the Feast of the Holy Apostles, cardinals banqueted in honor of the Holy Ghost in the company of their mistresses culled from the "hot houses" of Borgo Vecchio and of Via dei Penitenzieri. It may readily be imagined what those "hot houses" were and how many were to be found in Rome. They were so thronged that one of the most popular sights was the "race of prostitutes." Competing with these races were ballets in which nymphs danced while poets declaimed. The Pope, who was almost blind, stood at a window of Castel Sant' Angelo and enjoyed the spectacle with the help of an eyeglass.

Because there were not enough traditional holidays, he created new ones, the Cosmalia, on September 27th, in honor of Sts. Cosmo and Damian, the patron saints of the Medici house. There were shameful processions; fireworks of a vulgarity never before seen—and there had been much vulgarity; slaughter of bulls and pigs, an old carnival custom that consisted in the hanging of a pig under the vault, even in the middle of great churches, and its distribution, piecemeal, to the bloodthirsty populace. Then Pope Leo added to the pigs and bulls an elephant, gift of the King of Portugal, not for slaughter, but as an idol. He was named Annone, covered with a blanket of silver and gold, and sprayed with incense. In the howdah rode the buffoon Barabal, crowned with a wreath of oak leaves. Since Barabal rhymes with Hannibal, this situation naturally produced a deluge of verses. A prominent personage was assigned to him as mahout. He was enthroned in the Belvedere. Barabal died, unfortunately for him, and was lamented by the Pope. He was buried in the tower of the Vatican, and Raphael was summoned to paint his portrait on the palace door.

And then there were the hunts. Ten years earlier Cardinal Ascanio Sforza had been the great hunter of Rome, but then the sport of venery had fallen into disuse; Julius II preferring the hunting of men to the hunting of innocent little beasts. Leo X was not a skilled marksman and he would not have been able to see the game even under his very nose, but it amused him to give the signal to start, to follow the hunt through an eyeglass and

admire the prey. He had seventy dogs in his kennels. The chase, however, was only a pretext for more frivolous and less blood-thirsty adventures. His hunting lodges in Magliana and Palo were the forerunners of the enchanting palaces of Versailles and Fontainebleau.

This gaiety eventually proved to be costly. It was said that every morning the Pope found a basket full of gold next to his bed, and in the evening the basket was empty. The coffers left so full by Julius II were soon emptied. Even ten more coffers, considerably bigger, would have been emptied just as quickly. The crown jewels had ended up as pawns in the hands of Chigi, the richest man in Italy and perhaps in all Europe. The manservant and steward Scrapica no longer had small sums to distribute, nor did he himself receive his wages; it was now the Pope who needed a few farthings and Scrapica who gave them to him, thus returning a little of what he had purloined. But not all were so fortunate. The Academy, which was to have promoted studies and research and become the University of Rome, languished for lack of funds. Bembo returned to his native Ferrara. Even the arbiter of etiquette, Baldasare Castiglione, preferred the less impure air of the Marche and retired to the court of Urbino. The construction of St. Peter's and the other buildings remained at the same point at which Bramante had left it, even though the architect had arranged to have Raphael appointed as his successor. The great road that Julius II had opened along the Tiber, naming it after himself, and which he had thought of making the meeting place of civic life and art, consisted only of foundation stones.

Then the sale of indulgences was resorted to, and Martin Luther appeared on the scene.

* * *

Leo X appreciated some of the arts and cultivated them generously, especially music, which flattered and soothed him. Since it was essential to enjoy the worldly goods that God had bestowed upon him, he found it tiresome to think of those who

would come after; thoughts of the present were burdensome enough, so he did not bother about sculpture and architecture, arts that belong to the future.

He liked Raphael because everyone liked him and because Raphael had painted a magnificent portrait of him which, without altering his looks, gave him an air of gentleness and distinction, and he had painted beautiful portraits of the relatives, prelates, and poets who were closest to his heart, and one of the elephant. He liked neither Leonardo nor Michelangelo.

Leonardo, the perpetual wanderer, had also come to Rome, attracted by the restoration of the reign of art after the reign of war. Giuliano, the Pope's brother, was Leonardo's friend and made him an allowance, but in the Belvedere the Pope had been an indifferent host to the most glorious and oldest artist of his country. This man, who wandered from Mount Mario to the Villa Adriana in his geologic researches, who studied Archimedes and who wanted nothing less than to reclaim the Pontine Marshes, inspired only antipathy in the sedentary *bon vivant*. His head was too full of abstruse things. When Bramante died, one year after the election of the new Pope, Leonardo thought that he would naturally be the one appointed to succeed him, at least as Chancellor of the Seal. The man who produced little but gave much thought to fanciful schemes needed an immediate and easy livelihood. Instead, the position was given to a buffoon. Then came the death of Giuliano. His protector gone, Leonardo left the Vatican, Rome, and Italy and went to France, where he was warmly welcomed and honored by Francis I, who made him a generous allowance. Vigorous of mind and body, he seemed destined to a long life, but there remained to him only a few more years, spent in dreaming and in probing the dark realms of physics and metaphysics. He died a sad and lonely exile.

Nor did Michelangelo, who was the same age as the Pope, appeal to him. The artist was fifteen when he entered the house of the Medici, at Lorenzo's wish, and there he had lived as an equal of his sons, but Giovanni, then already a cardinal, was,

after all, the master's son while the other was only a paid guest. The Magnificent, from his lofty post of authority, had bowed graciously to the youth so filled with bright hopes, and looked upon him as an adopted son. The boy Cardinal, with the jealousy characteristic of adolescents, had looked upon him as an importunate interloper. Now this former table companion, who had also become famous, looked at him with penetrating eyes that disturbed him, while in the lines of his forehead could be read a mixture of rebuke and threat. He spoke little and acrimoniously, and seldom laughed. The Pope liked men who gossiped and spoke honeyed words, who laughed continuously or made others laugh. Michelangelo reminded him only too well of the Dominican prophet of grief and misfortune who had forecast the ruin of the Medici family. What had entered the mind of this glum artist that he too should preach expiation and punishment from the ceiling of the Sistine, with those senile prophets, gloomy sybils, angels armed with swords, that terrible God who created the world with a gesture of anger and malediction and unleashed deluges upon it when He ought—as he His vicar on earth was doing—to have created enchanted gardens?

CHAPTER XIII

LEO X'S affection for Raphael was shared by all Rome, just as his dislike of Michelangelo was shared by many.

Raphael lived upon the earth, in the midst of men, a child of his time, spiritually formed in the mold of the century. He took his luck where he found it, participated in all the activities of the gallant and cynical society of the times, no stranger to the sentiments and the habits of his fellow creatures. Though he translated into celestial images the beauty of earthly things, he nevertheless remained comprehensible to all and was loved by all. Michelangelo lived in the world of Greek and Biblical lore; later it was the Biblical world that became his sole preoccupation. His soul was hurled violently from the earth to an atmos-

phere of spiritual cyclones. Mankind offered him only the raw material which he melted down in the fire of his passion, transforming it into allegories that inspired awe and terror. There was always an element of fear in the love he inspired in others.

Raphael gave forth sympathy and good will as naturally as a flower gives forth perfume. He was as a garden filled with flowers and fruit that everyone could enter and, without touching anything, carry away something of its beauty. Michelangelo was both the summit and the abyss, the rock, the steep gorge, the impenetrable forest, and from him breathed forth, as from a sacred wood, an exhalation that inspired awe, panic, and fear.

Raphael personified the happy idyl, Michelangelo the epic tragedy. The former had the joy of the creatures of the sun which was always denied to the latter.

That joy of life and of art that bubbles up as naturally as from a mountain spring lifted Raphael from the earth, carried off the child favored of the gods to a paradise of joy and love. It seemed as though the fetid breath of the earth never dimmed the limpid crystal of his soul. Michelangelo, whose spirit hovered in eternity, was nonetheless deeply rooted by the suffering he seemed to seek, bound by a link of anxiety and discontent to the earth and to all the furious passions of his time.

Raphael imitated now this and now that artist who had preceded him, and in imitating he always improved, for he bestowed upon what he found that touch of grace which others thought they could learn so easily from him but which they never achieved. He brought to perfection the attempts of his predecessors to realize their ideal, and in this lay the secret of his appealing art. He gave what the eye and the spirit seek, surpassing all expectations, surprising and enchanting the spectator.

Michelangelo broke the stamp of every tradition, he opposed every current idea, he rebelled against all masters even while admiring them, and he despised too those of his contemporaries who did not know how to infuse in a work of art the motivating force of a great idea. History, nature, religion, he welcomed in his thought, engulfing them all in his art.

Raphael, in a brief yet intensely lived life, filled the world with his masterpieces. It seems incredible that such an abundance of work could have been crowded into less than twenty years. The rapidity and the ease with which he completed the thousands of figures in frescoes and paintings and tapestries is astonishing, for at the same time he superintended the Capitoline Hill excavations, and studied and collected ancient works of art. His was an elemental force, whose current was swollen by the works of his disciples. It was so easy to imitate him that his disciples often continued what he had barely started, for it was enough that he add the finishing touches to make the work his. Without effort he attained, and he knew he had attained, perfection. Michelangelo's was an unsatisfied genius. God granted him a long life and to the last day the strength to work, but the works completed by him were not proportionate to his years of labor. He wanted to do everything himself, and no one could ever put a hand to his work without spoiling it. Few of his works satisfied him, and he left many unfinished. He felt the deafness of matter to the calls of his spirit, and it was perpetually tantalizing. He knew he could never achieve ideal perfection, although by our standards he usually realized it. Always wanting to do more than he could accomplish was his aspiration, his cry to God, but it was also his eternal tragedy. He is the personification of the divine enigma.

* * *

After the death of Pope Julius, Michelangelo had no further reason for remaining in the Vatican. In the immense Chapel peopled by the figures of his imagination he felt like an outsider. His fate was that of a father who feels deserted and cheated when his children have grown up and left his roof. He packed up his few belongings and went back to his den in Macel dei Corvi. Even the names of the house and of the neighborhood seemed made for a friendless man, for a wild animal that wanted only to creep back into its lair. "I have no friends of any sort and I don't want any," he had written to his brother Buonarrotto: his great friend, his only real friend, had left him. Despite his

furies, his explosions, his staff, his avarice, Julius II had liked and understood him and he too had understood the Pope. A reciprocal confidence had been established between them. Perhaps only he had been able to appreciate the great stature of the Pope, and when he painted his immense prophets, he had him in mind.

Now that Julius was no longer there to distract him with other requests, he could again take up his work on the tomb, and since the Pope was now dead, the tomb became a necessity which it was his obligation to finish. However, so enormous a plan would take years to carry out, nor was there enough money for so much expense—"One hundred thousand crowns—let it be two hundred thousand!" While the Pope was living he could make long-term projects and plan to work ten, twenty years; now he had to solicit work. With the della Rovere heirs, who were Cardinal Santi Quattro and Cardinal Aginense, he drew up a new contract, smaller than the first, providing for a much-reduced expenditure: sixteen thousand five hundred gold ducats. There were to be seventeen, not forty, statues—only seventeen and a bronze bas-relief.

A vision in color floated before his eyes, a gentle *pietà* for which he could find no place in the great fresco, so he made a sketch of a Descent from the Cross, coloring it only in part, leaving it incomplete. The urge to touch marble again took hold of him and left him no peace.

He started work on one of the biggest blocks brought from Carrara in order to carve out a Moses, which was to be one of the principal figures of the tomb. His spirit had not yet left the mysterious world of the Old Testament. His mind was still agitated by something frightening and ominous that he had found no way of expressing in the fresco. Perhaps he had wanted deliberately to reserve for stone his greatest concept, the greatest of the characters of Genesis. Now that the Pope was dead he felt closer to him, and in his solitude held with him long conversations which, when the Pope was alive, had been so short. He would idealize him in the image of the ancient legislator. He,

who never drew his characters from reality, either alive or dead, could nonetheless transfer them from life into myth.

Then, coming out of that tragic and mythical world, he began to carve simultaneously in the marble the figures of two chained youths, known as the Slaves or the Prisoners, which so puzzled those who tried to explain his enigmatic allegories.

He did not finish the Moses at once. The terrible giant that issued from the marble disturbed and oppressed him, and he needed, every now and then, to escape from his obsession. He would leave it and take up some detail of the knees, of the hands, of the folds of the drapery before facing again the majesty of the severe face. He worked contentedly on the figures of the Prisoners with a love that was patient and pure. He wanted to finish them to the last detail in every fold and in every jointure, and to give to the marble the soft warm glow of living flesh. Perhaps no other work of Michelangelo reveals so clearly his love of perfection and his delicacy of touch. He created them with love and loved them after their creation.

"I hope to begin to work hard," he had written his father when settling down to his task. And he worked hard, as was his wont, but the sublime delicacy of the statues betrays none of the labor and effort that were poured into them.

* * *

Leo X also took him away from this work. He had no commissions in Rome for the great sculptor, but he did not like to have the artist work for the glory of his predecessor—that "damned Jew," as he liked to call him. Nor did he like the della Roveres, whom he was planning to dispossess of the duchy of Urbino in order to place his nephew Lorenzo there in their stead. When, in the second year of his papacy, he went to Florence to pass triumphantly under the arches of triumph that were greater and more elaborate, if that were possible—and it was possible—than the Roman ones, he thought it more fitting to work for the glory of his own family. The church of San Lorenzo,

which had been erected by his forefather Cosimo, was a beautiful church but it still lacked a marble façade. In Rome the basilica of St. Peter had been left half done, yet San Lorenzo in Florence had to be completed. He invited the most famous artists, including Michelangelo, to send him plans. Raphael, the Sangallos, Jacopo Sansovino, Bandinelli, and others, perhaps Leonardo also, sent plans. Leo X had his likes and dislikes, but he was also capable of showing good taste and fairness: he chose Michelangelo's project.

Michelangelo had presented a grandiose plan, adorned with a mass of sculpture, because it was in his nature always to see things in large perspective, and no one could ever have hoped or pretended to surpass him; but it may be that in drawing up his plans he never had any intention of carrying them out. Affection and duty held him bound to the tomb of Julius II, but there was now another Pope, Leo X, to whom he must bow. Pope Leo said that he would himself arrange things with the della Rovere heirs, Cardinal Santi Quattro and Cardinal Aginense, and they, in turn, were only too glad to defer to his wishes. The work on the tomb of Julius II was again interrupted. There remained in the shop in Macel dei Corvi the two unfinished adolescents, the still unformed Moses and a few other marbles that had scarcely been roughed out.

At the beginning of 1516 Michelangelo closed his house in Rome and returned to Florence. From there he went to Carrara for his marbles. His departure from Rome brought secret relief to his rivals, who had been oppressed by the power of the genius of this small man who so assiduously avoided his fellow men.

CHAPTER XIV

20 DESPITE HIS EAGERNESS TO WORK, these too were lost years. His life, which had acquired strength and unity in the Chapel, lost it in Florence and in Carrara.

Among the marbles of Versilia and Luni he might have

found once more the leisure to dream, the warm fellowship of the rough laborers with whom he felt at home, and in the shelters built against the storms, seated at a table, before a fire, he might have talked of stones, of art, of their troubles, of God, in the simple language of the men of old—a language unknown in Rome.

Instead, he found more troubles, worries, and dangers.

In Carrara he knew where to look for marble with a perfect grain, and he found traces of the large M's that he had carved in the stone as a whim ten years before. Now while he was digging his blocks he received from Cardinal Julius de' Medici, a nephew of Pope Leo, orders to dig the marble in Pietrasanta which was in Florentine territory. This was the result of the usual intrigues of landowners, speculators, and dealers of every kind, who were uninterested in both art and economy. Pietrasanta marble was not only inferior to Carrara marble but, in order to transport it from the mountain to the sea, which was at a considerable distance, a long road had first to be opened in the wild hills. It would then be necessary to continue the road on an embankment of piles over swampy ground to the beach. Michelangelo objected, but in vain. The orders of the Pope and of the Cardinal became peremptory. Michelangelo's replies betrayed his anger: "I shall go find Cardinal de' Medici and the Pope, and I shall tell them my story, and I shall stop the work here and shall betake myself again to Carrara, for there they pray to me to come back, as Christ is prayed to." But it was futile: he had to submit and remain in Pietrasanta to dig second-rate marble, to spend more money, and to waste more time.

When, after countless vicissitudes, journeys back to Rome, and despair over the condition of the marbles that reached Florence, he finally hoped to find peace, a new disappointment awaited him. This time, too, his original plan, already large, had grown in his imagination. There were to have been nine statues; now he decided upon twenty-two, with large bas-reliefs between them. He had entrusted his friend Baccio d'Agnolo with the task of making a wooden model, which Baccio did, but, as

was to be expected, Michelangelo undid it. He was never satisfied with a work designed by him and executed by others. He thought it childish. With his own hands he made a new model, in clay, which he sent to the Pope. But Leo X had already forgotten about the façade of the church of his forebears, or, if he thought of it, he no longer had the means to do anything about it. While the sculptor was enlarging his plans, the Pope found that the funds were diminishing. Michelangelo waited in vain for money to set to work on the great project, which would require help of all sorts, and which he was planning to complete in eight years.

A house, at least, had been assigned to him in Florence as a shop for his work, and there he had transported the first marbles. Since Pope Leo had graciously granted him leave to work at the same time on the tomb of Pope Julius, he turned to the tomb and took up again the series of the Prisoners.

Not even these were to be finished. There were to be another four: one youth to be added to the first two already finished, and three old men. They were different in every respect, for he continued to have new ideas. He set the four large blocks in the shed and worked first at one, then at another, but did not finish any. The tragedy of life that does not succeed in vanquishing the apathy of matter is expressed in these muscles and tendons that try to free themselves from the hold of the stone, in chests that swell with a mighty breath, in biceps that struggle without any hope of liberation while their heads are still buried in the marble. They are like atlantes crushed by an immense weight—truly captives and slaves of stone.

Was it lack of time? Did he lose heart? Did inspiration leave him? Was this to be the sum of his destiny—the Incomplete? The great façade of San Lorenzo remained only in the clay model. The great tomb of Julius II was reduced and impoverished more and more. The Prisoners were but a shapeless mass in which pulsed, twisted, suffered, a life oppressed by a relentless fate. At that time the cartoon of the Battle of Cas-

cina, plagiarized and reduced to bits by envious and ignorant hands, was also thrown to the winds like the ashes of a hero.

Was there any relation between his destiny and his spirit? Was it up to men, to spectators, to complete, by their desire and with their mind's eye, what he held inside him but had not infused in the stone? It was men and his own nature that kept him from the fulfillment of his dreams. Time and the long life he lived could have permitted him to complete the unfinished work, but worry and the dissatisfaction inherent in his character rendered worthless the favors of time.

Posterity will see in that incompleteness a necessity of art, will make an aesthetic principle of it; it will say that in that incompleteness the artist wanted to make apparent the effort made by the figure in its eager desire to free itself from matter. It could be said with more reason that genius is by nature impossible to satisfy, and Michelangelo's most impossible of all. In the self-confidence of his first youth he had thought his abilities boundless, but now he felt that, beyond the limits of his abilities, although they were extraordinary, lay infinity. The great artist would henceforth often leave his works half done, convinced that he would not be able to bring them to perfection, and conscious that the work of his hands alone was not sufficient to carve out his ideal image from the reality of stone.

* * *

He was over forty—nearly forty-five. He felt old, but then he had never felt young. Youth had really flown, as he had heard sung in his first years, in the great palace of his protector, and not for a single moment had he done anything to stop it in its flight.

* * *

On April 6, 1520, Raphael died.

He was the incarnation of eternal youth, and yet he died at thirty-seven. A short while earlier in Venice Giorgione had died even younger and his great contemporary, Titian, was to

survive him by many years just as Michelangelo was to survive Raphael.

But he had filled the world with the most enchanting beauty of form and color. Rome shone with the munificence of the Pope and the grace of its painter. This century was already taking the name of those two.

The city retired within itself in mourning and in grief; its noisy voice was hushed. Leo X, when he was told of the serious illness of his painter, closed the Vatican to feasts; he took him the comforts of religion and of friendship, he wanted to remain with him alone, and alone he wept. He wept, this man who seemed to know only how to smile.

The funeral procession extended from the Borgo to the Pantheon like the obsequies of a god; and the young god was buried in the temple dedicated to all the gods. It was a Good Friday, as Good Friday had been the day of his birth.

The year before, in the same month, Leonardo da Vinci had died in France.

CHAPTER XV

20 MICHELANGELO became Florentine again after ten years, during which he had become almost entirely Roman, and Florentine he remained for roughly twenty years.

Forty, fifty, sixty: those were the years of slow aging, and yet he was only part way through his long life. He was indefatigable in his old age, but these years in Florence were years of inertia and anxiety. He had already created many great works of art, but he had not yet attained the peak of his glory. Had he died young, as Raphael did, the greater portion of his genius would have remained unexpressed. At fifty-five, when the activity of an artist begins to slow down, he was still only at the halfway mark.

The fifty years of his old age were the fifty years of his glory. They were also the fifty years of Italy's ruin.

He had now attained, for the life of the body, ease and well-being, but nothing in the life of the spirit encouraged him to enjoy those wordly goods—the guerdon of so much effort and contention. But to take from that mind which was in a perpetual fever of creation, from those hands that did not know how to be idle the possibility of work was to throw Michelangelo into a state of exasperation and despair that bordered on insanity. Taciturn and solitary as he was, that madness raged within him, accentuating the roughness of a disposition that was already unapproachable; or he exploded suddenly into eccentricities and frenzies that only those who really understood and loved him could endure. But then he would regret his outburst, and he would say humbly to his friends, “Mad and wicked as I am,” or “I should like to throw off my melancholy and my madness.” And he confessed also to the weariness he derived from that state of mental agitation. “If I work one day, I have to rest for four.”

But the sarcasms and ironies with which he flayed his colleagues and rivals were not always tolerated. Bitterness poisoned his critical mind, and he appeared to be selfish even when he did not wish to be so. Sometimes he was unkind, but then he repented and by generous actions tried to redress the wrong he had done. Jacopo Tatti, known as Sansovino, defeated in the contest for the façade of San Lorenzo and then treated roughly by Michelangelo, wrote him stinging letters of reproach, and Michelangelo, regretting his harshness, found work for him. The only exceptions to his general disdain for all the artists of his time were those who were humbly devoted to him, or the outstanding being who charmed him by his virtues, real or imaginary.

The presence of a youth endowed with intelligence and beauty held him in a state of melancholy exaltation as would a celestial apparition: seeing him was like having a vision, his proximity made him forget life. No man was born to appreciate friendship more keenly, and none was more altruistic in friendship, but no one had fewer real friends. A young man named Febo del Poggio, who to Michelangelo seemed an almost divine

being, and whom he loved and extolled even in poetry, was nothing but a blackguard.

* * *

He was now free to enjoy his affluence and the respect of Florentine society. The author of the David was now the author of the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel as well. True, the plans for the façade of San Lorenzo were not to be carried out, but he had won the contest. In this world, however, merit, virtue, fame, honors, do not travel on parallel roads. The brusque manners of this unsociable man, who was really proud and shy, were not such as to attract sympathy. If, in his greatness, he liked to hold himself aloof, there was no reason why others, in their insignificance, should hurry to take him out of that solitude which was convenient to them and inconvenient only to himself. Nor did the civic authorities deign to raise him to eminence, for he came to like the Medici less and less.

He despised them, these Medici, who were immature, spoiled, depraved, impertinent, and ignorant, the degenerate offspring of an ancient stock. There was no doubt that the Signoria highly esteemed this man who was, after all, the most illustrious Florentine of his time, but that esteem amounted to offering him the very modest post of a government clerk at a salary of five ducats a month. He would gladly have accepted the position had he been able to pass it on to his brother Buonarrotto, but that could not be done. So he refused it. He refused it especially because at that time the plague had broken out in Florence and he did not want to bring his brother, who was living quietly in Settignano, in contact with it.

The elder Buonarrotti had also retired to Settignano to live the pleasant life of a rich landowner on those farms to which his son kept adding with his savings. Michelangelo went there sometimes, despite the discomforts and annoyances that his quarrelsome family forced upon him. The household was the quintessence of mediocrity, and Michelangelo, who was inordi-

nately aristocratic in spirit in spite of the modest existence he led, was offended by the spiritual vulgarity of his family.

For these reasons his visits were rare, but they served as a means of recruiting stonecutters, who were always to be found in the fertile region of Settignano. Although he worked little, he seldom appeared at the social gatherings of the city, such as the receptions held in the Oricellari orchards, which adorned the gardens of the magnificent Palazzo Rucellai, where the master of the house presented comedies written by him and where cultivated men gathered to discuss philosophy and art. Plots against the Medici were hatched secretly here. Here, too, could be seen Niccolò Machiavelli, who occasionally came down from his house in San Casciano and who, for these occasions, doffed the peasant garb which made him look loutish and awkward and donned the academic robes which always so became him. It was at these reunions that he read his *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Liviticus*.

Michelangelo sometimes put in an appearance there also, urged by Varchi, a studious young man who admired him. It is possible that the sculptor of David and the secretary of the Florentine Republic met. Niccolò Machiavelli, much sought after and listened to, talked easily and wittily, his words colorful and rich, and he exhaled a good humor that he perhaps did not feel. Michelangelo listened willingly, as he always listened to the words of others, and disagreed with everything he heard. The two greatest Florentines passed next to each other in those learned and mundane gatherings, and brushing past, never looked each other in the eye. For insight, clear, facile, and shrewd, and exaltation, somber, religious, and heroic, are not made to understand each other.

Yet this tormented and haunted man also had his moments of good humor. He refused invitations to feasts and celebrations, but when he let himself be led by a gay and pleasant group of friends to dine outside the gates of the city, he enjoyed it with the childlike delight of the pure in spirit. These outings, which

occurred more often in Florence than in Rome, were a blessed diversion in the long days of black humor. He became a happy clown and amused the company with his biting epigrams. The poor and simple-minded Bugiardini became his victim. Michelangelo often asked him to dinner and amused himself by stuffing him with food and raillery. He also liked singing, and wherever young people gathered to blend their voices in sweet melodies, there he was to be found. The poet Francesco Berni, author of satirical poems in *terza rima*, had been his friend in Rome, and now in Florence they sometimes met and exchanged verses. He wrote other poems and burned a great many more written in years past which he no longer liked.

One of his chief occupations was drawing. He started studying anatomy again with all the enthusiasm of a twenty-year-old neophyte. He thought of writing a treatise on anatomy for young painters. He constantly urged his friends and pupils to study the art of design, and on the margins of his own drawings he wrote to his favorite pupil, Antonio Mini, the admonition, "Draw, Antonio, draw, Antonio, draw and waste no time."

But his finished works in these years were few and not of the best. He did not touch the four Prisoners that he had left unfinished, certainly not because he lacked the time, but because weariness, irritable discontent, and savage pride kept him from working on them. It was the aversion, full of torment and anguish, of a creator for the creature which he has conceived but ceased to love before it is born. Instead, he finished to its last polished detail a magnificent, vital group, surging with the fresh impetus of a jet of water, which represented the Genius of Victory. It was probably intended for the tomb of Pope Julius II. The generations to come could as well have put it on his own tomb. The youth, with beautifully chiseled features, who pushes with his knee against the slain monster but who, with his body and head, recoils from the unpleasant contact and sighs for other battles, is the spirit of the conqueror who feels no triumph or joy over his victory but wishes to forget it. For him victory

over the opponent is not cause for joy or pride, but an unexpected source of new doubts. The true victor does not linger over his conquest but flees it.

Another work of these years, almost finished, is a Christ Redeemer, scarcely more than life size and an inferior piece of work. It probably would not have been better even if he had been able to finish it completely. He said later that in order to sculpture or paint the image of Christ one must lead a saintly life and one's mind must be entirely pure. Perhaps during those years his mind was not such, nor his life. He had, in a contract, promised the statue to a Roman gentleman, Metello Vari, before leaving Rome. He began to work at it soon after he arrived in Florence, but intermittently and without interest. He sent it to Rome unfinished by his pupil Pietro Urbano. A foot was broken on the way. Urbano made the foot over and fixed up in his own way the unfinished parts. It was a disaster. Michelangelo's pupils were clumsy, and he did not know how to choose better ones. Another Roman sculptor, Frizzi, who in those days enjoyed a certain renown, attempted to repair the damage but the statue remained just as mediocre. The client was nonetheless pleased with it, probably only because it bore the name of Michelangelo. It can be seen today in the Minerva church in Rome.

After this he made nothing but plans. No month passed that did not bring from every part of Italy requests for work or advice, which he refused or put off, or promised with no intention of keeping the promises.

For some time his friend Ginori had persisted in trying to obtain from him a medal that he wanted to give to an innamorata. The subject, an Atlas supporting the world, was not one that appealed to him, so he advised his friend Ginori to order it instead from a young man who was acquiring fame as a goldsmith. He was an eccentric and violent young man, different from all his other pupils, who followed and admired him in his own independent and stubborn fashion, and who thought he had within him something of Michelangelo's genius. His name was Benvenuto Cellini.

Ginori insisted on Michelangelo, for even if Cellini was performing miracles as a gold and silversmith, Michelangelo was after all Michelangelo. So the sculptor unwillingly made a drawing, then demonstrated that his young rival's design was far more beautiful than his and left it to Cellini.

Not infrequently his pitiless criticisms, which his rivals called slander, helped to accomplish something, and if he had always been listened to, Florence would have been spared a great many monstrosities. When he saw the open gallery that Baccio d'Agnolo was building around the drum column of Brunellesco's cupola, he dubbed it a cricket cage, and as a result the work on the gallery, which was too frail to support such a massive structure, was abandoned.

He had given much thought to Dante; he had already got together a volume of drawings for the *Divine Comedy*—drawings which, entrusted to a friend who was going to Rome, were lost. He had already demonstrated his veneration for the poet upon other occasions, and now he wanted to put it into a great work. Twenty Florentine notables, with the cardinal's vicar at the head of the list, wrote the Pope pleading that the ashes of the poet be returned to Florence. Michelangelo was among the twenty who signed the list, in which there were no names of notable men of letters except those of Jacopo Nardi and Luigi Alamanni. Among so many Latinists the only one who did not know Latin, Michelangelo, added to his name, in the vernacular, the offer of his services. He wrote the Pope that he would do Dante's tomb at his own expense.

This would not be the grandiose and sumptuous tomb of Pope Julius. It would be something more simple and severe, as befits a poet, but the sculptor would have put his whole heart into it, for he was losing interest in the Julian tomb, subject of so many disputes. Death, his constant and haunting obsession, always inspired in him thoughts of sepulchers.

But there was no tomb for Dante, just as there was no longer to be any tomb for Pope Julius, nor a façade for San Lorenzo. He continued to think, to dream, to quarry marble, and to

waste time. Had it been the intention of the Medici to keep him from working and to put obstacles in the way of his growing fame, they could not have acted more astutely.

The church of their forebears was no longer mentioned, either in the Vatican or in the Medici palace. Michelangelo was earning nothing and found himself out of pocket, but his patrons, tyrannical and suspicious bankers, wanted it understood that he had derived some profit from his dealings with them. It was true that some money had been advanced to him, but it had all vanished in the quarries of Pietrasanta. He wrote indignantly about it to his friend Sebastiano:

"I am not putting on the bill the wooden model of the façade I sent to Rome; I have not put on the bill the three years I wasted on it; I have not put on the bill the fact that I have been ruined by the San Lorenzo undertaking. I have not put on the bill the great harm done to my reputation in asking me to do this work and then taking it away from me—nor do I yet know why. I have not put on the bill the damages to my house in Rome, which I had to leave and where I have lost, in marbles, tools, and work already done more than 500 ducats. Even without counting all that, I have only 500 of the 2300 ducats left.

"Let us come to terms: Let Pope Leo assume the cost of the work already started and the marbles that have been quarried, and I shall take the money that remains, and then let me be free."

Sebastiano Luciani, vigilant and solicitous in the interests of the master, was, to some small extent, his representative in Rome. Michelangelo continued to furnish him with cartoons and drawings, confided his troubles to him, and entrusted him with errands. At Raphael's death Sebastiano considered himself then to be the foremost painter in Rome, and Michelangelo upheld him justly in that opinion. He begged Michelangelo to return to Rome, where he would find work enough to buy not only castles but whole cities. "You put fear into everyone, even into Popes." It may have been he who suggested to Michelangelo that the latter ask the Pope for permission to paint the last frescoes in the Vatican. Michelangelo refused, as Sebastiano had known he

would. Sebastiano then requested Michelangelo to ask for him. Michelangelo asked nothing for himself from the Pope and did not wish to ask anything for his friend Sebastiano. He merely wrote Cardinal Bibbiena, but in a manner so bitter as to seem calculated to defeat its own ends.

"My Lord: I beg your most Reverend Lordship, not as a friend or servitor, for I do not deserve to be one or the other, but as a humble man, poor and mad, that you make it possible for the Venetian painter Bastiano, since Raphael is dead, to have some part in the palace work; and if Your Lordship deem it time wasted to do favors for such as I, I think that there is some satisfaction in doing something even for the mad. One eats onions as a change in diet when one is tired of chicken. I beg Your Lordship to make this attempt for me and the service rendered will be very great, for the said Sebastiano is a worthy man, and even if it be useless to do something for me you will not be unrewarded so far as Sebastiano is concerned, for I am sure that he will do honor to Your Lordship."

Sebastiano was not given the commission for the last of the *Stanze*. It was given to Raphael's own disciples, who continued as best they could the work of the Master. The Pope, definitely abandoning all idea of the great façade, commissioned Michelangelo to do a work of much smaller proportions: the construction of the new sacristy and the library of San Lorenzo. But Pope Leo died, and the work never progressed beyond the planning stage. It was taken up again by Cardinal Giulio de' Medici when he became Pope. To the architectural works of the sacristy and library the new Medici Pope was to add an order for sculpture—sculpture for the tombs of his family . . . more tombs.

* * *

The last years of the Pope who wanted to be surrounded by gaiety were not gay. War and death passed darkly over the Medici family and the Vatican. One by one, his dearest friends and relatives had left his gardens of the Hesperides to descend

into the realm of shadows. They were all young, these dead: Raphael, his brother Julius, his nephew Lorenzo, his sister Madeleine Cybo, Lorenzo's mother, Alfonsina Orsini, and the little Countess Ridolfi. The Pope who loved happy and noisy company wandered silent and alone in the enormous silence of his great uninhabited rooms. A train of sorrowing shadows followed the man who was so afraid of shadows.

Meantime a storm of international conflicts rumbled and drew near. Leo X had a subtle and shrewd diplomatic turn of mind. Lorenzo's prudent son had inherited his father's sagacity and ambition, tempered by his own nature. Behind the mask of an indolent epicure there lurked also an adventurous spirit that he knew how to curb. His spirit was more contemplative and anxious than his face indicated (in spite of that deep line in the middle of his forehead), but his speech and manners carefully concealed it. Though he seemed to lead a life only of pleasure, during the few years of his reign he had shown great ability in making important political maneuvers. But his diplomatic subtlety had only served to enmesh him in an extricable tangle of complications. He had postponed the perils of the Anglican schism, which were still in the embryonic stage, by pretending to approve the theological pretensions of Henry VIII, but the attacks of the Augustinian friar from Württemberg, who was well armed in theology, were more dangerously pressing. Charles V and Francis I were beginning their long struggle for European supremacy, and the papacy became the fragile intermediary between these two giants who were coming to blows in Italy. He put himself between them at the risk of being crushed.

Pope Leo died on the first of December, 1521. Shortly before his death he had entered into a league with Charles V, and the preceding month he had ordered great festivities to celebrate on November 24th in the most solemn manner the victory of the Empire over the French. On the twenty-sixth he was stricken ill; he died five days later, before anyone had understood the gravity of the illness and without any attempt at a cure. Was it a natural death or was he poisoned?

History often has the appearance of legend, and legend may be history. It was so easy in the Vatican to die of poison that a natural death appeared incredible to the people. An autopsy was ordered and the heart was found to be covered with spots about which doctors squabbled and talked learnedly. The one thing certain is that the debt-ridden Pope was given a very poor funeral and a modest sepulcher.

The pontiff who succeeded was not an Italian but a German, the last foreign Pope, a creature of Charles V, pious, cultivated, austere, who despoiled the Vatican of its last tinsel.

CHAPTER XVI

IT WAS not the papacy that was broken up, but Italy. Throughout its length, from the Alps to the Ionian Sea, the peninsula lost, little by little, its autonomy and power, only to become the field of battle where the masters of Europe faced each other on a sort of proving ground and where the aspirers after hegemony came to measure their strength. Spheres of influence were beginning to be mentioned, and these first spheres of influence, the rich and fertile provinces of Lombardy, Tuscany, and Campania, were to serve only to feed the armies of the invaders. Henceforth a land of conquest and pillaging, Italy also became the promised land of merchants and speculators who descended upon it in the wake of the victorious armies to plunder its natural resources and its works of art. The robust vitality of the old stock then produced a great rise of energetic and astute *condottieri* and diplomats, but these political and military geniuses, Andrea Doria, Mercurino da Gattinara, the Marchese of Pescara, put their swords and their brains to the service of first one, then the other, master. Men of letters and artists were no better. Freedom and dignity were lost, and with dignity gone, the will to work was also lost.

The French peril similar to that of 1494, and which was followed thirty years later by the Spanish and Austrian peril,

reappeared with Francis I. The victory of Marignano seemed to give prestige once more to Francis' reign and to his supporters in Italy, but the victory was followed by the routs of Bicocca, Romagnano, and the defeat of Pavia in which, although he was able to save his life and his honor, he lost all hope for European supremacy. The Empire of Charles V stretched so wide in Europe that the sun never set on his lands, and in that Empire Italy was no more than a province.

The great European war which the French and Spanish waged in Italy touched off the civil warfare in which noblemen and adventurers turned treacherously against each other under the banners of France and Spain. It fired the ancient passions of the little Italian states, the old spirit of factions, and the internecine rivalries, in the midst of which the Vatican oscillated first between one victor then the other. Alliances were made between Florence, Venice, and Milan for the support of the King of France to which the Pope adhered, meanwhile secretly negotiating with Charles V; but mutual distrust and selfish interests broke up these coalitions—ephemeral and changeable alliances in which each party laid claim to its military and diplomatic autonomy. A bond of general interest in a common ideal was lacking, and yet perhaps in that attempt at resistance, discordant though it was, the first breath of national independence was drawn. And it was assuredly on this shipwreck of Italian strength and virtues that the great art of Italy cast, like a giant beacon, its last and brightest splendor.

* * *

When the learned theologian from Louvain who took the name of Adrian VI came to the papacy, by the grace of the Emperor, Charles V, artists and men of letters, merchants and beautiful women, courtiers, servants, and soldiers poured out of Rome, leaving it deserted. The German Pope wanted only Swiss guards; of the hundred grooms of Leo X, he kept only four. His doctor was Flemish, his painter was Flemish, his buffoon was Flemish. And a fantastic Flemish woman, the "sainted laun-

dress" of Pietro Aretino, did his cooking and his laundry and made his bed for him.

But he did not live long: his papacy lasted less than two years. It was not possible to change in twenty months of reform the bad customs that had been growing for a century.

Upon Adrian VI's death Cardinal Giulio de' Medici was elected Pope, and artists, men of letters, merchants, courtiers, servants, and beautiful women returned to Rome. The new Pope, who had grown a beard like that of Julius II, perhaps in the hope that a great white beard would give him that same degree of importance and authority, did not decide at once, as was the tradition, upon the new papal name. He hesitated a long time in the choice, then resolved upon the name Clement and became Clement VII. Perhaps he remembered a certain prophecy of Savonarola's, still talked of in Florence, that under the papacy of a Clement extraordinary and ruinous events would occur in Italy. If he remembered it, he wanted to defy it, to prove, perhaps, that he was not a superstitious Pope. In Germany, where the reforms of Martin Luther were spreading and acquiring importance, it was rumored that the new Pope was the son of the devil incarnate. Who knows why? He was not worse than the other Popes. If he seemed, and if he was, weaker than his predecessors, he lived in times that were much more difficult and he had more powerful adversaries. The Roman court was always the same. Machiavelli had spoken ill of it; Guicciardini added his opinion: "Whatever evil may be spoken of the Roman court, more can always be said."

Michelangelo, like every other artist, had been disappointed by the election of a foreign Pope indifferent to art, but he hoped that at least this Pope, who was indifferent to the art and the legacy of Pope Julius, would leave him alone and free to work on the everlasting tomb. His friends and the della Rovere heirs of Julius started negotiations in an effort to reach an agreement. There was now question of only a modest monument, which the artist, who dreamed of great things, had promised himself to

finish only because of his veneration for the memory of his old friend and for the money that had been advanced by him. He would not put the tomb in the immense St. Peter's but in the more modest San Pietro in Vincoli. However, the new negotiations were interrupted by Adrian's death and by the election of Clement.

The first thing that every new head of Church, State, or family wants to do is to upset the old order and revolutionize the quiet and peaceful life in which his predecessor, in his last years, has slumbered. Clement VII also started out with great resolution and firmness, but little by little the weight of years, sorrows, and misfortunes was to make him wavering and uncertain. Toward Michelangelo he immediately behaved as a master. What was all this about the tomb of Pope Julius, since, besides the building of the library and the sacristy of San Lorenzo, Michelangelo would also have to make the statues for the tombs of the Medici for the glorification of the new Pope's family? As to the heirs, Clement VII would soon make them see reason. One could disobey Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, but not Pope Clement, for a cardinal who became Pope was free to indulge his slightest whim, and even enemies had to bow before each affront, awaiting, no doubt, the day of their revenge. The della Roveres, who had been badly treated by the Medici, who hated them and were hated in return, and who made no pretense of saintliness, could not but yield to the Pope's orders. They became overbearing and vented their ill-humor on Michelangelo. Submissive before the Supreme Pontiff, they became vicious with the defenseless artist. They tormented him with requests, injunctions, and calumnies, while on the other hand the Pope held him shackled and relegated him to San Lorenzo.

At the news of the election of Cardinal Giulio even Buonarroti's old heart had warmed. He wrote immediately to a friend in Carrara: "You have heard how Medici has been made Pope: which it seems to me has made everyone rejoice: and which

makes me think that much will be done for art." Good habits, piety, and economy are all very well, and no one could appreciate better than Michelangelo these virtues in a Pope, but art is art and in Italy art is everything.

The artist condemned for so many years to inactivity already saw himself again in a forest of magnificent marbles, saw them transformed into magnificent statues for San Pietro in Vincoli and for San Lorenzo. Clement VII consented, as Leo X had, to his working again from time to time on Pope Julius' tomb, but just as he had done little or nothing on the tomb, tied as he was by Leo's vagaries, so he could do little or nothing now, held back by the whims and orders of Clement. And the della Rovere heirs continued to vituperate against him, calling him profiteer, charlatan, and thief.

Michelangelo then decided, or resigned himself, to get rid of every obligation and every promise, to repudiate this task imposed upon him by affection and memories and which had become an incubus that paralyzed and suffocated him. He would give up all the work already done, restore all the money remaining to him and which did not begin to compensate him for the cost of the marbles and the workers' hire, the fatigues endured, the hardships borne, the lost years, and the vanished hopes of finishing a work of art greater and more beautiful than any other. He would sell a farm or house, anything to be left in peace "for if I cannot work, I do not live."

He was not left in peace. It was now that his martyrdom was starting, the martyrdom that he was to call the tragedy of the tomb.

* * *

Not even Pope Clement left him alone, for in trying to make him work too much he too kept him from living. He was in a hurry.

"You know that Popes don't live long," he wrote Michelangelo. And he urged him on: "Do not fear that you will lack either work or rewards so long as we live."

While still a cardinal he had asked the artist for something

from his hand, "something good," for the tombs of his family. The sculptor of his choice was Baccio Bandinelli, who, a few years younger than Michelangelo, considered himself greater in intelligence, skill, and knowledge. Baccio Bandinelli, a mediocre, academic sculptor and good-for-nothing—"a man made up entirely of evil," said Cellini, and who, already dear to the Cardinal's heart, had made deep inroads into the Pope's purse—considered himself the leading Florentine sculptor and as such had looked upon the great marble monolith lying upon the beach of Carrara as being rightfully his. "The most beautiful marble ever seen" had already been offered by the Signoria to Michelangelo, and the latter had thought of transforming it into a Samson battling the Philistines. This Biblical giant was to be placed opposite the David, on the terrace of the Palazzo Vecchio.

Bandinelli had followed the Pope to Rome, and whether for that reason or another, the Pope commissioned Michelangelo, who had remained in Florence, to finish "something good" not only for this or that statue but for all the tombs for his family, of which there were to be six. There was work for many years, and again no time left for the tomb of Pope Julius. He began to block out the statues of the two captains, Giuliano and Lorenzo.

Michelangelo was a man who fled from all discipline except that which he imposed on himself of his own volition or from a sense of duty, and the Pope knew it. Clement offered him a pension of fifty crowns a month on condition that he would not marry and that he would enter a minor Franciscan order. It was not much to ask, but it was odd and impertinent and in keeping with the aggressive and haughty manners of the pontiff. Michelangelo, at fifty, had certainly no more desire to take a wife than he had had at twenty. He feared the bonds that would have limited the freedom of his liberty as a wandering artist. He had, after all, always lived as a poor and mendicant friar, but the Pope's bizarre proposal did not appeal to him and he refused. Fifteen ducats would suffice, just so he could work when and as

he pleased. He also left the large house that the Medici had offered him near San Lorenzo.

His friends were astounded. He was truly mad, mad and childish. He was seeking his own ruin, he did not know how to behave. "You are belittling yourself," they wrote to him, and Jacopo Salviati, a friend of the Medici and of his, who understood how he had been hurt by the vanities and weaknesses of Bandinelli, tried to give him courage.

Humiliations and annoyances followed for the unfortunate man, whose pride and honesty men of small stature, who appeared great only because of the height of the pedestals upon which they stood, wished to punish. A storm of hostility and misfortune continued to beat down upon him from everywhere during those years.

He needed money, for he was always reluctant to touch his savings, which, as they grew to a respectable sum, seemed to him almost sacred. His brothers, near by, depressed him even more than from a distance. His poor demented father continued to slander him, yet he pitied and served him all the more. He brought himself to ask what he had been refused before, but the Pope turned a deaf ear. He wrote humble letters to Rome to his friend, the Pope's steward, Canon Giovan Battista Fattucci. He was forced to write again. The Pope most certainly enjoyed the doleful pleadings of that proud man, and Baccio Bandinelli must also have been amused by them. It was a pleasant spectacle to see the haughty man, pitiless in his criticisms and contemptuous of his fellows, bow his head and plead his cause.

Michelangelo bowed and pleaded, but with flashes of anger:

"I shall never stop working for Pope Clement with whatever strength I possess, which is not very great, for I am old; but I must not be slighted and treated badly as I am now, for these things weigh heavily upon me; and for some months I have not been permitted to do as I wish, for one cannot work with one's hands at one thing and with one's brain at another, especially when working in marble. Here they tell me that these annoy-

ances are meant to spur me on. I say that spurs that make one turn back are useless."

The letter was written to Canon Fattucci but was meant for the Pope.

One fine day the Pope had a fantastic idea: Michelangelo was to erect a colossus for him in the Piazza San Lorenzo, considered in Florence to be almost Medici property, a colossus of unheard-of proportions, built of brick. In comparison the giant snowman of Cousin Piero had been a constructive and practical idea.

Michelangelo had a mind as queer as the Pope's and more caustic. He pretended to take the request seriously, inspected the Piazza, found that the most appropriate place for the preposterous colossus was the corner of the Palazzo della Stufa (where, however, a barber had his shop), and replied to his friend Fattucci in a way that should have betrayed the jest:

"And because there might be some difficulty about pulling down the shop because of the rent it brings, I thought that the figure might be in a sitting position and the seat would be so tall that by making it hollow inside, since it will have to be constructed bit by bit, the barbershop could be placed inside and the rent would not be lost. And since the barbershop must have an outlet for smoke, I thought of putting a cornucopia, hollow in the middle, in the statue's hand which would serve as a chimney. And since the head, like the other parts of the body, would be hollow, I think it too might be put to use, as suggested to me by a huckster friend of mine in this Piazza who told me confidentially that he would put a dovecote inside. Then another idea occurred to me which would be even better, but the statue would have to be made considerably larger; which could be done because towers are built of separate blocks. My idea is to have the head serve as the bell tower for San Lorenzo, which is in much need of one, and by putting the bells in the head the sound would come from the mouth and it would seem as though the colossus were crying for mercy, especially on feast days, when peals are rung more frequently and bigger bells are used."

And in case his friend the canon and the Pope had not understood the joke, he added a play on words:

“As to whether a thing that is to be done ought or ought not to be done and which you say must be delayed, it is better to let it be done by those whose business it is to do it, for I have so much to do that I no longer care to do it. As for me, I shall be satisfied if it be an honorable thing . . .”

So the beautiful block of marble that Michelangelo himself had quarried in Carrara for the giant to be placed opposite the David was to be given to Baccio Bandinelli and he, Michelangelo, would be given the bricks for the grotesque figure to be built in the Piazza San Lorenzo!

CHAPTER XVII

➤ APPROACHING STORMS again drove the Medici from Florence. Michelangelo went periodically to Rome to receive orders from the Pope or to seek to bring to some conclusion the negotiations with the representatives of the Duke of Urbino. He was there again in the winter of 1527 when he sensed the winds of a tempest brewing, and he returned to Florence more hurriedly than usual. The mercenaries of Charles V did, in fact, fall upon the city shortly after. Duke Charles of Bourbon, who was at their head, was killed during the attack, but Rome was put to fire and sacked in a way that had not been seen in ten centuries, since the invasion of the barbarians. The people, and historians, saw in that carnage the just punishment of God on the new Sodom.

April 6, 1527, the sack of Rome. On April 16th the Florentines drove out the Medici.

After thirty years it seemed as though the good days of the first democratic republic of Girolamo Savonarola had returned, and since they were without the nightmare of his terrifying warnings the people were happier in their freedom, and more resolved to defend it. All they remembered of the sermons was the prophecy that after the storm Florence would see the birth

of a new spring. Christ was again proclaimed King. The old ordinances were given new life by a common enthusiasm, by a fervor for concord, and by a spirit of sacrifice for the days of peril and hardship that would surely follow. Now from everywhere enemies were determined to destroy Florence's liberty, to put her back in chains, and Florence would have to defend her liberty against everyone.

In the confusion of the first days something had been hurled from the windows of the Palazzo Vecchio against the Medici supporters, a stone or an old bench, which had broken off one of the arms of the David. The arm was put back and David again took up his challenge to the advancing Goliath.

Michelangelo felt his faraway youth surge up within him with the vigor and freshness of living springs; he was fifty-five. Of the gonfaloniers elected to rule the city the second, of plebeian stock, Francesco Carducci, was his friend. The first, the aristocrat Niccolò Capponi, was not. But all the people were behind Michelangelo. The Council of Eighty decreed that in order to defend a city of great art a great artist was needed and, "knowing how excellent an architect he was," elected Michelangelo to be one of the Nine of the Militia, and put him in charge of the fortifications of the city, with the salary of one gold florin a day. They gave him back the monolith taken from him by Bandinelli and he lent the city treasury one thousand crowns.

Clement VII, a voluntary prisoner in Castel Sant' Angelo, had for a while been able to resist the Spanish and German soldiery, then had fled to Orvieto. Rome was a city deserted and steeped in blood, the Vatican a barracks and stables, the Pope a puppet in the hands of the Emperor; but there was no doubt that the puppet who harbored thoughts of revenge while bowing before the Emperor, would, in exchange for his services, be reinvested with the papal purple and tiara by his imperial master. There could be no doubt that the plots of vengeance, brewed and pondered by the Medici Pope, would be directed at Florence especially, his own city, the city that had disowned

and driven out his family. Florence, then, would have to be fortified with bastions and cannons, preparations would have to be made to defend the Republic against the Pope and the Emperor.

During those days Niccolò Machiavelli, that other Florentine lover of freedom and defender of his Republic, died. Machiavelli had written much and done much in an attempt to persuade Florence of the necessity of forming a well-organized defensive militia. He, too, had drawn up a plan for fortifications, and doubtless, had he lived, he would have combined the resources of his mind with those of Michelangelo's. An army, which until then had not existed, was improvised and for that army, which lacked a leader and which Florence was unable to provide, a Perugian captain, Malatesta Baglioni, was appointed. Fortifications had to be improvised as well.

Art could now be put aside for the sake of freedom; it had to be thus. So Michelangelo put freedom before art. He left the sacristy of San Lorenzo and took up a position on the walls, at the top of San Miniato, which he considered a bulwark of the city. He had always claimed that art was of paramount importance and that the artist ought not to become involved with other things. It was the spirit of youth that spoke thus, but at fifty-five ideas change, and if in his youth he sometimes appeared to be indifferent to the world of reality, now it could be seen how much passion was hidden under that indifference. He felt that he had never loved his city so much, and he certainly never hated the Medici more. He made hurried outings to Pisa, Leghorn, Arezzo, and Cortona—wherever there were fortifications to be supplied with ammunition. In order to learn the art of offensive warfare, he was sent to Ferrara to Duke Alfonso, founder of cannons, who was considered a past master in that art.

From the eccentric Duke he received homage, honors, and courtesies and the inevitable request for a work of art, in marble or on canvas. He acted as though the artist had gone to him for amusement, to enjoy a peaceful vacation and thought of keeping him in Ferrara for many months, for always, if he

wanted; but the artist was traveling only in his role of military engineer, feverish and rushed, and he had nothing in his mind but towers, battlements, turrets, and cannons. He did not even want the hospitality of the palace and went to sleep at the inn. During his stay there he met Lodovico Ariosto, the great poet who admired him so much—"Michael, more than a mortal, angel divine"—and who was to die before long.

He returned quickly to Florence, taking back with him what he had learned and leaving the Duke only with the promise of a painting. He also thought of lending him twelve thousand crowns: it was the surest place of deposit for his money, since he knew that the duchy of Este had one of the richest state treasuries.

But back in Florence—it was September of 1529—he was absorbed by worries that were not long in becoming the usual hallucinations. He felt disappointed and uncomfortable. The Florentine people, who had been of one mind in the enthusiasm of the first days, again let themselves be torn by their innate spirit of criticism and intolerance. The Medici supporters were not all dead, nor flown, nor unarmed. The first Gonfalonier, Capponi, vacillating and uncertain, had been dismissed and then sent as ambassador to Charles V, and the Gonfalonier Carducci, although a honest man, was weak and credulous and too self-assured. The army was badly organized and its commander not eager to fight. The air was heavy with treachery and deceit, and Michelangelo, defeatist by nature, sensed it better than anyone else. He had suspected Capponi of putting obstacles in the way of his defense work; to Carducci he revealed his doubts about the usefulness of that work. They were considered stupid fears. The Gonfalonier replied that the enemy army, badly co-ordinated and still more badly fed, without supplies, demoralized and decimated by the plague, would be defeated—that Florence was impregnable and that she would win.

Michelangelo's fears were not stupid ones. He asked permission to leave his post; it was not granted. Someone, a stranger, who waited for him in a solitary spot outside the San Niccolò

gates, came to meet him at dusk and whispered in his ear the suggestion that he leave Florence, to put himself in safety; he accompanied him home, dined with him, had a saddled horse ready at the door for him. There were, in fact, three horses for him and for the two young men who would accompany him. To run away, to flee, to escape—this was also his father's weakness.

He made arrangements with friends who shared his thoughts and fears and one night, together with his pupil Mini, a young member of the Corsini family, and the goldsmith Piloto, left Florence by an almost unguarded gate. They took the road to Venice, the only city in Italy that had kept its independence. Halfway there Corsini and Piloto, seized by remorse, or perhaps by the fear that they might not be able to earn a livelihood, abandoned him. He arrived in Venice with Mini only on the evening of September 25th.

* * *

This time it was not possible for Michelangelo, now famous, to pass unobserved in Venice. The Most Serene Republic had its great artists, and one above all the others, Titian, radiated his glory well beyond the boundaries of the Republic; but Michelangelo was a great man, and a work from the Florentine sculptor would enhance the glory of the Venetian monuments. He received offers and invitations, and the assigning of a large pension was discussed, in addition to the price of his works. Michelangelo thanked them, made promises, but remained hidden in the Giudecca. His only present before leaving was the gift he made to the Doge, a drawing for the Rialto bridge, which was still only at the planning stage.

He did not want to settle down in Venice; he wanted to go to France. It was something he must do, for liberty, for dignity, for peace of mind in working. Francis I, enemy of the Medici, was friendly to Florence and an admirer of Michelangelo. He had already acquired, or had been given, the Hercules that the sculptor had made in his youth for the courtyard of the Strozzi palace. Now Michelangelo would go to the court of the King of

France, just as Leonardo had done, and in France he would do the great things that Italy no longer permitted him to do. The great sculptor and the Florentines always looked upon His Most Christian Majesty as a friend, even after the King, or his mother, had signed the Peace of Cambrai, which abandoned them to their fate.

He wrote to his friend Giambattista della Palla, with whom he had agreed to emigrate, asking him which road he was to take and where he could meet him. Della Palla had given up the idea of that weak moment; he wrote his friend, exhorting him to return to Florence, assuring him that the Republic would pardon him. Thirteen exiles had been proscribed—Michelangelo among them—and their property confiscated; for Michelangelo an exception had been made, deferring for a few weeks the severe decree. Let him then return to take up again his position as governor of the fortifications. It was his duty.

His friend, more hopeful and more credulous even than the Gonfalonier Carducci, wrote him: "I tell you that not only do I find myself without fear of any sort, but for several days now so full of hope for a glorious victory and so joyful in spirit that if God, either for our sins or for whatever other reason, according to His inscrutable ways, did not deliver this broken army into our hands, I should suffer the disappointment one suffers, not when a hoped-for good does not befall, but when one loses one already acquired."

He arranged a meeting in Lucca, where, with the permission of the Signoria, he went to bring Michelangelo back safely to his native city; but he waited in vain, for Michelangelo had gone by another road. He wrote him renewed exhortations, as did many other friends.

Michelangelo realized that it was his duty to return. He felt the shame and remorse of cowardice, and he reacted against the weakness of fear with the energy of a penitent man. He asked for mercy from the Republic, and the Republic sent him a promise of safe-conduct through an old stonecutter. His friend the Duke of Ferrara provided him with letters patent and the Flor-

entire spokesman in Ferrara, Giungni, with a recommendation to the Signoria.

What would he have done in a foreign land, far from Rome and Florence, where the air one breathed, however false and poisoned, was still the atmosphere of great art? And the voice of family affection added itself to the other voices calling him back. His ninety-year-old father had been increasingly lonely since Buonarrotto's death. His poor brother had wanted to come down from Settignano to be close to him, though Michelangelo tried his best to dissuade him because of the plague. But one day Buonarrotto had come down, caught the sickness, and died in his brother's arms. Michelangelo had sent his father to Pisa for safety, together with his young grandson, Michelangelo's nephew Leonardo, and he had to look after their needs. The confiscation of his property would have been his ruin, his father's death.

* * *

And so he returned. He had taken three thousand crowns to Venice, and he brought back only fifty. The Republic imposed a fine of fifteen hundred crowns, commuting the proscription to exclusion for three years from the Grand Council. This was the price of his escapade. Household goods and effects had been put safely away by a worthy woman, aided by his friend Granacci.

He again took up the direction of the fortifications. The city of flowers became a city of arms. When the enemy surrounded it on every side, showering it with fire, Florence uprooted all its flowers, devastated its beautiful gardens and the large villas that were its crowning glory, in order to build defenses. Troops of young men burned the countryside within a radius of one mile, cutting down large trees to make barricades and bastions of them. Destruction was visited above all on the villas of the Medici and their followers, halting only in wonderment before the Last Supper in the church of San Salvi. Its young painter, Andrea del Sarto was dying of the plague at that time.

Michelangelo was the leader of the devastation. The great lover of beautiful things destroyed beauty. Rumor ran that he also wanted to raze the Medici palace, but they were words spoken only under the stress of anger. From the top of Brunellesco's cupola he watched the movements of the besieging army. He was still convinced that the defense of the city should be concentrated on the hill of San Miniato and that the hill should be held against the enemy to the last, for once it was occupied the enemy would have Florence at its mercy. He established himself in San Miniato, which he had left before because of the opposition of Capponi, who preferred to carry on the defense elsewhere. He was on watch night and day. When the exhausted but indomitable city was able to gain a short respite from the besiegers, the artist took refuge in the sacristy of San Lorenzo, closing his eyes to the visions of war and reopening them to his great dream. For a short while the city made a show of serenity and security, and the young defenders of Florence played football in the Piazza Santa Croce, under the fury of enemy cannons. Michelangelo in his desperate grief lost himself in work. The two captains were now almost finished and alive in the marble. With his chisel he tested the other blocks in which he would later express sad new concepts. Then the signal of alarm would call him back to the hill.

He made a small fortress of the ancient church of San Miniato, turning the belfry into a watch tower which he covered with hundreds of wool and straw mattresses against the attacks of the enemy, and around the church he placed his cannons in an attempt to create disorder in the ranks of the enemy coming relentlessly nearer and nearer. Resistance was futile. Provisions, at first so abundant, were now lacking; the plague spread, and in three months there were six thousand deaths caused by disease and hunger. Malatesta Baglioni betrayed the city, and the Republic was abandoned to the Pope and the Emperor. It was the eighth of August, 1530. The earth shook, wrote Varchi, under the feet of the citizens, who were pale as death.

Then came the usual revenges, which are called reprisals

and are nothing but outbursts of ferocious cruelty. The Medici, protected by Charles V and spurred on by Clement VII, returned to rule Florence with renewed arrogance. Already Charles had been invested by the Pope in Bologna with the imperial crown and with the iron crown of Monza. It was a sumptuous and ill-omened consecration, in the presence of an assembly of princes and cardinals such as had not been seen since Christmas of the year 800. It was the consecration of Italy's servitude.

It was perhaps the worst moment in Michelangelo's life. His best friends were condemned to death, among them the admirable Giambattista della Palla. The Gonfalonier Carducci, credulous but honest, was beheaded. Girolami, the last Gonfalonier, died in the tower of Pisa. Bologna offered Michelangelo the hospitality of the monastery of San Martino, where he could have lived and worked in security, but he did not want to leave Florence. While all the patriots sought to escape in flight, he, the fugitive, did not flee. He hid. His house was devastated, his marbles were broken, his drawings burned. Bandinelli took back the disputed monolith, which Michelangelo had already roughed out for a group of two men besides the Samson. The police and the Eight were hunting for him. He was saved by the parish priest of San Niccolò oltr' Arno, who kept him hidden in his church for several months, often concealing him in the belfry.

But he continued to work. He painted the picture he had promised the Duke of Ferrara. In the darkest hour of the night the graceful pagan vision of Leda and the Swan smiled light-heartedly at his spirit saddened by so many misfortunes.

BOOK 4

CHAPTER XVIII: THE MEDICI TOMBS CHAPTER XIX: PAUL III CHAPTER XX: THE LAST JUDGMENT CHAPTER XXI: TOMASO CAVALIERI AND VITTORIA COLONNA CHAPTER XXII: THE ATTACK OF ARETINO CHAPTER XXIII: THE MEDICI TRY TO WIN MICHEL-ANGELO BACK TO FLORENCE CHAPTER XXIV: LOVE AND DEATH



CHAPTER XVIII



CLEMENT VII extended his protection over the great sculptor. Alessandro de' Medici, the evil young bastard who had been put at the head of the Florentine state, hated Michelangelo and would willingly have done away with him, but the Pope defended him. The sack of Rome may have seemed to be nothing more than a common episode of war, the brutal unleashing of a victorious and ravening horde, but in Italy it had actually marked the end of an era. The Emperor had placed a headstone on the grave where the Renaissance lay dead. The decadence of the Italian character and of the Italian states, which had been the most flourishing in the world—a decadence that had started with the invasion of Charles VIII of France—had been completed by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. The Church could maintain itself and rise up again because the Empire was now supporting it, but the Reformation on the one hand and the Holy Inquisition on the other were hammering at it and confusing it.

Clement VII, the Pope, made vengeful by the humiliations he had suffered ("Oh," he told someone, "if only Florence had never existed!"), meditating perhaps on those humiliations, and on the dangers he had faced, and the family misfortunes, turned, in the last years of his papacy, to more humane actions and thoughts. He wrote to relatives and correspondents in Florence to look for Michelangelo and to bring him back to work on the tombs. He ordered the prior of San Lorenzo to give him the fifty crowns provided and to treat him well. He himself, he sometimes said to his intimates, had never done any harm to Michelangelo and it was wrong of the latter to fear and avoid him.

Sebastiano Luciani, who had painted a handsome portrait of Clement, was now the papal painter and, having been appointed

to the profitable office of Chancellor of the Seal (*Piombo*), was ever after known as Sebastiano del Piombo. He had become lazy and dissipated. Like Cellini, he too had been in Rome during the sack and had miraculously escaped. He had returned to the city aged by his trials, without will, dedicated only to the convenient philosophy of living free of cares and troubles. The enterprising Sebastiano, courageous and ambitious, whom Buonarotti so loved had vanished. He admitted that he was interested in nothing and made fun of everything, but he remained a friend to Michelangelo, his Roman confidant, and continued to serve him while also using him. He wrote him persistently, encouraging him to have faith in Clement. He wrote for himself and for the Pope. He went to find him in Florence and stayed there several days, doing nothing. He urged him to finish the works begun in Florence and to return to Rome, where he could live with greater glory and greater honor, as he deserved. He confided in him the high opinion the Pope had of him. "The Pope is pleased with whatever pleases you." The anecdote adds that Clement never received Michelangelo seated, for fear that Michelangelo would also sit. Although the sculptor had frightened Leo, he frightened Clement even more. This frightened man frightened all Popes.

Another friend, Benvenuto della Volpaia, a clockmaker who enjoyed a warm welcome in the Vatican, went so far as to show him a secret road by which he could arrive in Rome to enter the palace unobserved. He had prepared a room for him in the Belvedere, where he could live unharmed and see the Pope in secret when it pleased him to do so. He would wait for him at a certain place on Bramante's staircase at a given hour of the night. And if he did not like the Belvedere, he could be put up in Borgo Nuovo, in two rooms that della Volpaia had taken for himself.

But Michelangelo did not return to Rome at that time. Besides the work to be finished, he was so overcome with weariness that he could not move. Now that he had taken up again the chisel and mallet, those tools had become a part of him and he could not separate himself from them. He felt weak and ill; the

icy dampness of the sacristy in which he lived day and night gave him colds and fever. And besides the Medici tombs, he had on his hands some other statues which he had been commissioned to do by some Florentine nobles and which he had been unable to refuse; nor could he forget the neglected tomb of Pope Julius.

His friends lived in fear for him. In the autumn of 1531, one year after the end of the siege, his strength and spirit seemed so reduced, he was so thin and sad, "exhausted and shrunken," that his friends feared he might never recover. He had never been sick and this was his first severe illness. His head and heart ached. He did not eat and continued to work like one possessed. The kindly Mini, Bugiardini, and Granacci wrote to Florentine exiles and to friends of the Pope that their friend did not have long to live. He must be taken away at any cost, at least during the winter months, from that icebox of a sacristy. The Pope, who insisted that he get well, enjoy himself, and work serenely, finally intimated in a brief that if he attended to any other piece of work he would excommunicate him.

This was not disinterested affection, for the intimation that he was not to work for others was clearly an invitation to work for him alone, but that does not detract from the fact that during his last years he was a real friend to the artist. Because it was brought to his attention that his nephew Alessandro was treating his sculptor arrogantly, he summoned the Florentine ambassador and roared his disapproval so loudly that he was overheard in another room by Sebastiano, who hastened to report the papal tongue-lashing to his friend.

In revenge, the Duke refused to give him back the thousand crowns he had lent the Republic. Michelangelo appealed to the Pope, and the Pope did justice. Then even the hardened republican allowed himself to be softened. On the day that Clement VII set out for France to bless the marriage of the Dauphin with his niece Catherine, who was still almost a child and already beloved of all, Michelangelo, on a horse lent to him by Sebastiano del Piombo, went to meet him at San Miniato al Tedesco.

Clement VII was extremely fond of Michelangelo in his

own way. He was a friend to him as much as a Pope could be a friend to an artist and a Medici could be a friend to anyone. Julius II, paternal and rough, had certainly loved him more, and understood him. Clement VII, friendlier by nature, used and protected him. Perhaps the difference lay chiefly in the fact that Julius II had dealt with a young man twenty to thirty years old, only lately come to fame, whom he could look upon as having made with his favors; Clement found a man of his own age, whose sober ways and deeply religious character were well known to him and who was already universally famous.

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The Medici tombs, according to the Pope's plan, were to be six: two for the recently dead Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, and Giuliano, Duke of Nemours; two for the elders, Lorenzo the Magnificent and his brother Giuliano, killed at Santa Maria del Fiore; and finally, but most important, two for the Medici Popes, Leo and Clement.

He began with the tombs of the minor Medici, the only two that were finished.

He had accumulated so much sorrow within him in these years, such a weight of thought and eternal grief, so much disdain and contempt for man, so much despair, and disgust and weariness of life. The tragic sense of being had deepened the abysses of solitude and terror in his spirit. The vanity of all things had driven him back into the depths of his religion, into the desolate deserts of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Death, which had been by his side for so many years—even the years of his first youth—was now the constant companion of every hour, of every place; it followed him upon whatever road he traveled, persuaded and urged him in every action, sat close to him whenever he rested and meditated, wrapped in a shroud his every thought, pointed out to him the road to virtue. It was a terrible companion for a man who was to live so many years more.

He had started with the statues of the two captains, whom the people immediately named "The Thinker" and "Action."

He continued with the allegorical figures of Day and Night, of Dawn and Evening. After these, he wanted to carve statues of river gods, but he had no more than the idea. He did not have time to finish Day, whose face he left in the shadow, as though clouded over.

And Dawn, awakening weary and troubled, without the fresh tenderness of hope, seems hurt by the presence of that stormy day of trouble and bitterness.

He finished in every detail the statue of the Madonna, who holds astride her lap the Babe whom she suckles, the superb group harmoniously fused and compact, which realizes to perfection the ideal he had almost achieved in the Madonna of Bruges, that is, the ideal of a beautiful statue, which, to be perfect, should be able to roll from the top of a mountain without breaking in any part.

* * *

In these tombs of the Medici, Michelangelo's art attained its highest perfection. If, in the titanic and forever incomplete work of an artist who lived so long and produced so much, it is permissible to look for a summit, it is in these tombs that the summit of his work is to be found.

And he knew it. Someone pointed out that the statues of Lorenzo and Giuliano did not in the least resemble them as they had been in life. He retorted that in the centuries to come no one would remember Lorenzo's and Giuliano's faces. Over and above the truth of reality and the truth of history is the truth of art.

CHAPTER XIX

✿ MICHELANGELO had worked under the pressure of an incubus, but griefs and fears were not always uppermost in this caustic spirit, and in his darkest hour nature, reacting against his sadness, illumined with shafts of light the happy visions of

a paradise lost. He carved at about this time a youthful figure, life size, which was thought by some to be a graceful statue of Apollo, by others of David, and made a present of it to Baccio Valori, the man who he had hoped could save Florence from the return of the despotic Medici. He left for a time the enigmatic spirituality of the tombs and, indulging in another flight of fancy, painted the beautiful and shameless Leda embracing the white swan.

It was rather like an outburst of adolescent exuberance that still lingered in his embittered mind, a need to laugh, to gibber, to get drunk, to dream. He added to the Leda a cartoon of Venus caressed by Eros, which Jacopo da Pontormo was to paint later. He made a drawing, so wrote someone who had seen it, depicting the efforts of a woman who struggles against a ravisher who is stronger than she, but not without betraying an involuntary sentiment of happiness and pride.

He made a present of the painting of Leda to Antonio Mini, a pupil of his who was poor, and who wanted to marry off his two sisters as well as get married himself. He added two cases of cartoons and drawings. The frugal Buonarrotti, parsimonious especially with himself, was lavish with young people who worked honestly and who, although poor, knew how to cover their poverty with dignity. He sought out and liked particularly to help young girls who could not be married because of their poverty. The endowment of girls without dowry was to become almost a mania with him.

Poor Mini was unable to enjoy the benefits of the gift. He went to France to sell the picture to Francis I and was cheated by the friend to whom he had entrusted it. Shortly thereafter he died as poor as he had been when he had left, leaving his sisters without dowries. Later the Leda was said to have been burned as a sinful work of art by Louis XIII.

But these were only patches of calm in a perpetually stormy sky. His father's death, at the age of ninety, increased his sadness and sense of the futility of life. With the elder Buonarrotti gone, he could return to Rome for good. This he did on the twenty-third of September, 1534. He was then sixty.

He had gone back to Rome several times in the dark period after the fall of Florence, to take orders from the Pope, who was thinking of having him complete the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, to repair his house in Macel dei Corvi, and especially to endeavor to bring to a close the tragedy of the Julian tomb, which, from its original grandiose plans, had shrunk in proportion to a modest monument. Of the forty statues, which first had been reduced to sixteen, there were now to be only six.

Clement VII tried to temporize with the della Rovere heirs. His authority kept them more or less under control, but there were gnashing of teeth and muttered imprecations against Michelangelo. "They would have struck like snakes," said Sebastiano, "had it not been for the Pope's protection." Even without taking into account the marbles quarried and shipped by him, even if some of the work had not been finished, the artist could have considered himself quit of all obligations because of the troubles and worries he had endured. But for dukes or merchants, self-styled patrons of art, only money spent counts; and Michelangelo, who could not (nor was he obligated to) restore that money except the little he had not spent, was in their eyes nothing but a thief.

He nevertheless felt himself bound by an obligation that did not exist. If his love for art no longer bound him to the monument of San Pietro in Vincoli, his duty as a man of honor and his obstinate revolt against the Pope's overbearing manner chained him to the task. He ended up by making Clement think that he had received more than he actually had and let the della Roveres mention in the contract a sum larger than it actually was, so that the Pope would permit him to spend part of the year in Florence and the winter in Rome. In this way he contrived to work first on the one tomb, then on the others. To the della Roveres he had given up his house in Rome as guarantee.

In Florence, however, Duke Alexander's constant machinations left him no peace. The latter was under the impression that he could treat him as a mere servant, which was calculated to touch Michelangelo in his most sensitive part. Alexander invited him one day—and it was practically an order—to follow him on

horseback outside the walls of the city in order to study the land where a fortress was to be built. Michelangelo sent him word that he served Pope Clement and not the Duke, his nephew. He was afraid, but unbending. The Duke then turned to Antonio da Sangallo and to Alessandro Vitelli.

However, the insignificant little tyrant who sowed and reaped hatred, and who was soon to die by the dagger, was not one to court a second such answer. Michelangelo left for Rome, and it was his good fortune that he fled in time. He arrived in Rome on September 23rd; the Pope, his protector, died two days later.

Clement VII died, and in that same year, on the Day of the Assumption, Ignatius Loyola founded the Society of Jesus.

It was painful, at the age of sixty, to be obliged to move once again and to adapt oneself to a new mode of living, but it was salvation. Besides, where was the happy, gracious, singing Florence of his twenties, of his first step to glory? Where was the pleasant Florence of the Magnificent, the vivid, free, and hard-working Florence of the Republic? The atmosphere now was poisoned by intrigue, vanity, and deceit.

The best citizens, who were also Michelangelo's friends, had emigrated and were conspiring beyond the frontiers of Tuscany. Even the other young Medici, who, before the siege, had been with Alexander at the head of the government, conspired, under the protection of the Cardinal of Cortona—the elegant, turbulent, and libertine Cardinal Ippolito, the “mad devil” who gathered the exiled in his palace in Rome and called himself the keeper of the freedom of Florence. But the freedom of Florence had vanished, and the dagger of Lorenzino, in killing Alexander, was impotent to bring it back.

Liberty was dead and great art, too, had died with the painters, the sculptors, and the architects who had spread so much beauty in the world. The masters and companions of those happier days had departed, one by one. Botticelli and Perugino were dead. Lorenzo di Credi and Fra Bartolommeo, his contemporaries, were dead, and so were Piero di Cosimo and Franciabigio.

Francia and Luca Signorelli had died far from Florence and Albrecht Dürer far from Italy. Andrea del Sarto, the young man who had painted such perfect pictures, died in poverty and distress. Dead, too, and even younger, almost the same age as Raphael, was the solitary and retiring Antonio Allegri, da Correggio, who had filled his native Lombardy with so much light.

Michelangelo outlived them all. He carried to Rome his perpetual old age, his inexhaustible vitality.

But his somberness was relieved by a spark of joyous satisfaction. Baccio Bandinelli, that foppish academician who thought he had already supplanted him, and who had managed to take away from him the beautiful monolith, had started to hew from it a Hercules and Cacus to put opposite the David, so that everyone could see how much better he was than Michelangelo. He finished the absurd group with great effort and succeeded in having it placed on the stairs of the Palazzo Vecchio. Even Duke Alexander tried to oppose the flagrant profanation, but the Pope came to the support of Bandinelli. The Florentine people, unerring in their good taste, received it with jeers, satires, and stones. Hundreds upon hundreds of vituperative sonnets were attached to its base, just as hundreds and hundreds of sonnets of praise had acclaimed, a short time before, the statues of the sacristy. And for his masterpiece Bandinelli was paid the tidy sum of five thousand ducats.

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Michelangelo returned to his hovel in Macel dei Corvi. Even in Rome he felt a stranger, but he would have felt lost anywhere, this man who was at home only in the land of his dreams, a terrifying land, uninhabitable for ordinary mortals.

His old friends in Rome were either dead or living elsewhere. One who remained there, Sebastiano del Piombo was now so different from the young pupil Michelangelo had practically raised and who became Raphael's brilliant rival. Now he disintegrated in indifference and apathy. From afar he had been a solicitous and affectionate friend, but with Michelangelo again

in Rome, Sebastiano felt his disapproval and preferred to keep at a distance so that he might enjoy himself in peace. There were others, however, whom Michelangelo saw with pleasure, Florentine exiles who welcomed and honored him as their standard bearer. Cardinal Ippolito, the friend of Giulietta Gonzaga—the most beautiful woman in Italy—made him a present of a magnificent Arabian steed, followed by an escort of mules laden with forage.

He started work again on Pope Julius' tomb. He hoped that the new Pope, Paul III, a Farnese, would not notice it, absorbed as he was by the weighty cares of his new office, and would let him continue. His original ideas, which had so persistently clamored for expression, had been transposed in part to the tombs of the Medici. Now he wanted at least to finish the six statues he had recently undertaken. For thirty years the Moses, at first barely blocked out, then hewn little by little from the marble, awaited his final touch. It was the sole survivor of the large statues of the original drawing.

Pope Clement, when thinking of the finishing of the Sistine Chapel, had ordered Michelangelo to paint frescoes upon the large walls behind the altar of the Last Judgment, covering over old and excellent frescoes by Perugino. There was so much art in Italy that one could, with a light heart, destroy some of it. Michelangelo had not demurred, for the subject was worthy of his understanding and genius. It could not fail to please him to return to the chapel from which his name had radiated over the world and to make it all his. Even after the frescoes of the vault, where so many of his images and ideas had been interpreted, he still had something to say. This he would do on the wall behind the altar. He had already started the cartoon and he continued working on it; but he also continued and finished the Moses.

The great statue on which he had been working for thirty years was an idealized portrait of Julius II, imperious and dominating. It was also a self-portrait, not as others saw him, but as he saw himself.

The new Pope was, like Julius II, a man of grandiose ideas

and had ambitions of artistic patronage. He had been a man of the world and had vastly enjoyed it. Prisoner, together with Clement, in Castel Sant' Angelo, he had followed the Pope in the vicissitudes of his fortune. A Cardinal at twenty-five—forty-one years ago—he was sixty-six when the Conclave had unanimously elected him Pope. Born in Rome, Rome had welcomed him warmly. The Cardinals thought that at that age there were not many more years left for him to live, but Paul III's reign lasted much longer than that of his predecessors.

Michelangelo had hoped to be left in peace. In that difficult hour Europe was torn by the diabolical rivalry between Charles V and Francis I, and the Church was agitated by the revolutionary ferment of the Reformation. A Pope who wanted—and it was what Paul III wanted—to correct the Church and defend it against internal perils, to set himself up as arbiter in European conflicts and reconcile unyielding adversaries, must have other thoughts in his head besides paintings and statues. But Farnese knew that for a century the greatness of Italian art had served as a mainstay for the greatness of the papacy.

He had already assured himself of the services of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, who, after building the fortress of Florence for the Medici, was building many others for Farnese. He wanted, besides, to have Michelangelo in his pay and allotted him an income of twelve hundred ducats, which was to be set apart from the annual tolls levied on the Piacenza bridge over the Po—a revenue which in actual fact did not exceed six hundred.

Michelangelo dragged out his recent contract with the Duke of Urbino, but the excuse was an old one and the Pope gave him an answer that must have pleased him: "For thirty years I have had this wish, and now that I am Pope won't you grant it? Where is this contract? I want to tear it up."

The words should have pleased him, yet they made him afraid. Further discussions with the representatives of the Duke, prelates, and notaries, more worries, humiliations, and lawsuits, more disputes and slanders awaited him. Just as he had thought to come to rest in a safe harbor, however small, he was to be

tossed back again on the open sea, in the midst of new storms? When this new fear gripped him, Michelangelo was on the point of losing his mind.

For twenty years he had gone about demanding, shouting, raving, praying that he be freed from that yoke that was depriving him of breath and sleep, but it seemed as though others enjoyed his ravings and prayers, for he was never released from it. He himself took a certain pleasure in it, as a sick man enjoys his fever, and instead of throwing off the yoke, he thrust himself further into it. "No one is fighting you except you yourself," Sebastiano del Piombo would say to him, thus hitting upon the essential quality of Michelangelo's character, that continual and unconscious contradiction of a mind incapable of satisfaction. True, the della Roveres and their dependents had the minds of jailers. In Clement's time they had tried to persuade themselves that Michelangelo was in disgrace with the Pope, so that they might use him. It had been Sebastiano who had pointed out their mistake and proved to them that it was just the opposite.

The struggles of the great artist to shake off his bondage became truly heartbreaking. It had been agreed in the last contract that he would design and in part carve only two new statues in addition to the Moses, and the remainder, sculpture and architecture, he would entrust to his pupils, paying them out of his own pocket 1,580 crowns, which was what remained, after the accounts were made, of the money he had received during these thirty years. Michelangelo wrote letters to his friends and prayers to the Pope, subjecting his honest man's pride to the most painful mortifications:

"I do not wish to remain any longer under this burden, nor be vilified every day as a swindler by those who have wasted my life and honor . . . and only death and the Pope can take them from me," he wrote. "Painting is done with the mind, not with the hands, and he whose mind is not at rest produces work that shames him, and that is why, until my affairs are settled, I can do nothing worth while. Every day I am stoned as though I had crucified Christ. I find my youth lost, bound as I am to this

tomb which I defended as best I could against Pope Leo and Pope Clement, and my excessive faith, which was misunderstood, has ruined me. Thus does my fate decree. I see hundreds with incomes of two or three thousand crowns lying peacefully in bed, and I, with enormous labor, toil only to grow poor."

The Duke of Urbino refused to sign the contract, hoping to keep him anxious, and had the presumption to suggest that he first come to terms with his conscience. From what a source the sermon came! "I consider myself an honest man," replied Michelangelo, "for I have never swindled anyone, and yet because I must defend myself I am sometimes driven to act like a madman. . . . I am not a usurer, but a noble Florentine citizen, son of a worthy father. . . . My answer is that the Duke has a picture of Michelangelo which he has fashioned in his own image.

"It would have been better for me if I had set myself to making sulphur matches in my youth."

Since the new Pope, whom he hardly knew and in whom he did not yet have confidence, seemed to him a tyrant who wanted to upset his existence, when, at sixty, he thought to have found tranquillity and even to welcome a late and unexpected spring, the demon of flight again took hold of him.

He thought of hiding himself on the Riviera, in the monastery of the Bishop of Aleria, a faithful follower of Julius II, and a great friend of his, and there finish the last two statues. He would be near Carrara and he would be able to transport by sea the marbles he needed. He considered retiring to Urbino, which he had often thought of doing—he had, in fact, already tried to buy in that city a house with some land, although Francesco Maria della Rovere was a man it was better to stay away from. And if these places did not provide refuge from persecutions, he would flee to another country.

He did not flee. The Pope came one day to find him, accompanied by a train of cardinals. He wanted to search, with those restless weasel eyes of his, every corner of Michelangelo's workshop, inform himself of his way of living and working, and

see all the works he had in hand, the cartoons for the Chapel and the statues for the tomb. He saw the Moses. The following of cardinals saw it too, and they all looked in wonder and fright at the terrible Legislator who seemed to come forward, conjured up by a superhuman power of evocation, from the dark mists of the ages. It was not easy to avoid the contained violence of that look, and the authority in the firm gesture which reveals such power over man. The Cardinal of Mantua, who happened to be by the Pope's side, said to him: "Your Holiness, that statue alone suffices to do honor to the tomb of Pope Julius."

Paul III agreed. He invited Michelangelo to the Vatican, where he was to start at once on the Last Judgment. He appointed him chief architect, sculptor, and painter of the Apostolic Palace. As to the finishing of Pope Julius' tomb, the new Pope would himself give it some thought.

Was the tragedy of the tomb, which had been gnawing at him for thirty years, finally at an end? The epilogue lasted for almost the whole of Paul III's reign; the last stages were not exempt from other griefs and annoyances. He wanted to keep for himself the statues that were to portray Active Life and Contemplative Life (Leah and Rachel); the other three statues, and the architectural part, now reduced to little, he entrusted to the young sculptor Raffaello da Montelupo, to Giovanni Marchesi, and to Urbino, the young pupil who was his protégé and for whom he felt great affection. But Marchesi and Urbino, in dividing the work and the money, quarreled so much that he lost patience and threatened to get rid of them both and give the work to someone else or finish it entirely by himself.

Finis. The tragedy was finished. Finished, too, were the great dreams he had dreamed at thirty in the basilica of St. Peter and among the white mountains of Carrara. How little was left of his great dream, how many battles fought, how many enemies made! Michelangelo had not won, he had been beaten, he who wanted always to win against all and everyone. What was to have been a mountain of marble was now only a small stone in a small church. The work that was to have occupied his youth,

his manhood, for the glory of Pope Julius, and Italy, and his own name, the work that was to have been his greatest masterpiece, had almost come to naught. Nothing remained of it save a prodigious statue.

Finis. At least he no longer need think about it, it would no longer torment him. His tribulations were over. He was beaten, but free.

Posterity was to say what the Cardinal of Mantua and Paul III had said: the statue of Moses alone is sufficient to honor the tomb of a Pope.

Then Michelangelo re-entered the Sistine Chapel after an absence of twenty-five years. He gave himself up entirely to the painting of the Last Judgment. The grandiose scheme which he had been unable to translate into reality in the tomb he transferred in its entirety to the new work. "I shall paint dissatisfied and do worthless things," he confided later to a bishop, one of the Pope's intimates. But before the immense walls and later in the Pauline Chapel, his tormented genius rid itself of its discontent and he painted sublime things.

Luca Signorelli, who had found him a short while before, ill and discouraged, had said to him affectionately, "Fear not, the angels will come to hold up your arm and to help you."

CHAPTER XX

PIETRO ARETINO would also have liked to help him. The sovereign and miserable dispenser of servile praises and of cowardly malice, which altogether amounted to nothing more than useful blackmail, wanted to send Michelangelo his advice when he learned that he was making his preparations to paint the Last Judgment. Aretino exposed to him at great length his idea, which was a most involved mixture of allegories of Nature and Time, of Life and Death, of Hope and Despair, of Christ and the Anti-Christ, of Caesars and Alexanders, bathed in the light of Paradise and plunged into the furnace of Hell.

He premised his advice on a tasteless compliment: "It seems to me that you must be satisfied at having beaten the others with your previous works, but I feel that with the Last Judgment, which you are at present painting, you are thinking of surpassing the Creation which you have already painted, so that your present paintings which surpass your former ones, make you triumph over yourself." And he concluded with a last sprinkling of incense—that he wanted to break the vow he had made never again to see Rome so that he might see Michelangelo's masterpiece and then sing its praises to the skies. He had fled from Rome because of certain unseemly verses written by him about some pornographic drawings of Giulio Romano.

Michelangelo read the long-winded encomium, thanked him for the promise of writing about his work (who would not have wanted Pietro Aretino's praises, which were solicited by Popes and Emperors?), but added, with much irony:

"Magnificent Messer Pietro, my lord and brother, the receipt of your letter gave me both sorrow and joy. I greatly rejoiced since it came from you who are peerless in all the world; and I also grieved, for having already in great part finished the story, I cannot put to use your suggestions, which are of such excellence that if there had already been a Day of Judgment, and you had seen it in person, your words could not have described it better. . . ."

And he continued to paint his tragic religious concept, which was altogether different from the grotesque rhetorical description of Pietro Aretino. It needed all the profound Christian and Catholic sentiment of Michelangelo Buonarroti, all the revolt of his spirit as a believer and a patriot against the evil that dominates the world, and the indignation and the anger and ardor for justice which surged up, unbridled, in him at the sight of Popes, Emperors, dukes, cardinals, courtiers, buffoons, offending and trampling the name of God, to imagine so terrible a portrayal of the *dies irae*. If his thoughts turned to any model, he had in his mind the whole of the *Divine Comedy*, he still heard echoing in his ears the apocalyptic sermons of Savonarola. Greek

grace had forever abandoned the gardens of art; and Christian tragedy now occupied them entirely. The Reformation and the Society of Jesus were the successors of the Renaissance.

From the vault of the Chapel there still emanates an aura of ancient legend. The walls, the Last Judgment, strike sorrow and fear into the hearts of the spectators. It is impossible to dream before the Last Judgment: it is oppressive and terrifying.

He worked seven years at it. In its unity and harmony it appears to be a work that sprang forth in a single jet of inspiration, projected by a single creative gesture on the vast walls; yet it was the fruit of slow, methodic, minute labor, done day after day for seven years. Begun in 1536, after two years of drawing, it was solemnly uncovered on Christmas Day of 1541.

* * *

A young man whom he had known a few years before, and who had completely charmed him during one of his trips from Florence to Rome, often awaited him at the door of the Chapel to accompany him home. He was an extremely handsome young man, Tomaso Cavalieri by name, gentle of manner, who greatly enjoyed painting without himself doing very much of it. In those days Michelangelo's spirit, coming out of the darkness, smiled at visions of blessed shores; his eyes, full of tears, reflected the light of heaven, and death, for an instant, stepped aside.

On other days he granted himself some rest and, together with his young friend, went to a church to greet a lady who awaited him, surrounded by a circle of devoted admirers. This was Vittoria Colonna. It was a moment of lull in the midst of his daily storms. And finally there were always the secret meetings with Florentine exiles: the Strozzi, Donati, Gianotti, Luigi del Riccio, Bindo Altoviti, and others, which diverted and absorbed him. As though to appease the consuming fire of Biblical imaginings, he withdrew occasionally from the Chapel and put his hand to some marble block. He did not want to be entirely false to his native art, as he had been when he was painting the vault. It was then that he sculptured the Brutus. This portrayal of the

powerful and conscious avenger is the figure with the most virile and expressive head in all Italian sculpture.

He gave it to the exile Donato Gianotti, the incorruptible man who had been secretary to the Ten during the days of the siege of Florence.

The other exile and fellow conspirator, Filippo Strozzi, was then dying in prison. Lorenzino de' Medici had killed the tyrant Duke Alexander and concealed the body of his victim in one of the sarcophagi that Michelangelo had sculptured for the sacristy of San Lorenzo. To commemorate the death of the tyrant the republicans struck a medal of Michelangelo's head of Brutus.

CHAPTER XXI

AT SIXTY, a tardy and impetuous spring bloomed once more in the life of Michelangelo. The withered trunk grew green again in a springtime that was to last for ten years. A nebulous aura of sentiment surrounded the first ten years of his new life in Rome with gentleness and serenity. The friendship of the young man and of the lady of lofty sentiments was the gift that Heaven granted him just as his vitality was declining and he thought his life was over. Contact with poetry and with gracious beauty turned him into a poet again, and it was then that he wrote his warmest and purest verse.

He had already sent to Cavalieri in Florence letters that seemed to have been written in the delirium of fever, and which Bartolomeo Angiolini delivered in secret:

"Without due consideration, Messer Tomaso, my very dear Lord, I was moved to write to Your Lordship, not in answer to any letter received from you, but by being the first to make advances, as though I had to cross a small river without getting my feet wet, or ford a stream of water. But when I left the shore it was not the small stream that I had expected, but the ocean with its towering waves that appeared before me, so that if I could, in order not to be drowned, I should most willingly

have returned to the shore whence I first came. But since I am here, I shall harden my heart and shall go forward; and if I do not possess the art of navigating on the waves of the sea of your merit, your consideration will excuse me, nor will it disdain my inferiority, nor desire from me that which I do not possess; for who is unique in all things must stand alone in them all. Therefore Your Lordship, sole bright light of our century, cannot be satisfied by anyone else's work, being yourself without peer. And if something that I hope and promise to do should appeal to you, and if ever I am certain of pleasing Your Lordship in any way, I shall devote the present time and what time is left to me to your service; and I greatly regret that I cannot relive the past so that I might serve you longer, for the future allows but little time and I am too old. I have nothing further to say. Read my heart and not my letter, for the pen toils after man's good will in vain.

"I must apologize for showing astonishment in my first letter at your rare genius, and so I apologize for I have seen my error; for to marvel that Rome produces divine men would be tantamount to marveling that God performs miracles. The universe confirms our faith in this."

He dated the letter "the first happy day for me of January." He made three or four drafts of that and other letters, in search of the most expressive or allusive sentences, which often resulted in turgid and obscure phrases.

The young man replied courteously and reservedly. The praises and affection of such a man could not but flatter him, and make him a little overbearing toward his equals, but the excess and the violence of that affection disturbed him as would the presence of a man delirious with fever. He sought to give himself and Michelangelo a cause for it: "I do believe, indeed I am sure, that the reason for the affection you bear me is this: being yourself an unsurpassed artist, the incarnation of art itself, you are forced to love those who follow and love it: I am among them and in the latter, according to my capacity, I yield to few."

But had the words of the youth been even colder, they

would only have served to increase the fire. The delirium continued, and Michelangelo wrote words even more exalted. He was no longer himself, he was beside himself.

"I could at this hour as easily forget your name as the food by which I live; indeed, I could more easily forget the food by which I live, which only nourishes my body miserably, than your name, which nourishes my body and soul, filling both with such sweetness that neither worry nor the fear of death is felt by me, so long as you shall live. Think, if the eyes could also enjoy their portion, in what a state of happiness I should be."

When his eyes finally had their portion, and Michelangelo was able to enjoy every day the sight of his beloved young friend, he no longer trod the earth but was truly the most blessed among the blessed. His outbursts of temper became less frequent, his bitterness was assuaged, his soul was no longer torn in its desires. He forgot the worries, wrongs, dangers that his imagination created. He did not see the miseries of reality. He was filled with the most improbable hopes. He smiled.

In confidence he said to his friend Gianotti: "I am the man most prone to conceive affections that was ever born. Whenever I see anyone with any quality, with any talent, who can do or say things better than others, I cannot help becoming fond of that person, and give myself to him so that I no longer belong to myself, but entirely to him."

Michelangelo gave priceless gifts to his young friend; he made exquisite drawings for his amusement—the rape of Gany-mede, the fall of Phaëthon, a bacchanal of children. He drew a portrait of Tomaso, a thing he had never done of anyone before.

It is extraordinary that, considering the flood of lascivious writings in vogue at the time, there were those who were surprised by a sentiment that enchanted and somewhat humiliated the proud man in the presence of the charming youth; there were malicious tongues, too, that spread rumors, among them even the man who had least cause of all to do so, Aretino.

Ascanio Condivi, who was a mediocre painter but an honest man, devoted to Michelangelo, with whom he lived and who in

these years culled from the master's conversation notes, confidences, recollections, in order to write his biography, wrote these words:

"He has, moreover, loved the beauty of the body, as becomes one who knew it so well; and he loved it so much that certain carnally minded men who cannot understand the beauty of love if it be not lascivious and shameful found reason to think and speak evil of him; as if Alcibiades, who was a most comely youth, had not been chastely loved by Socrates, from whose side, when he lay down with him, he was wont to say that he rose as from the side of his father. I have many times heard Michelangelo discourse upon love, and have heard it said afterwards by those who were present that he spoke of love as Plato wrote of it. As for me, I do not know what Plato wrote about it; but I do know that having spoken so long and intimately with him, I never heard from his lips any but honest words which had the power to quench in youth every uncouth and licentious desire that might arise."

An unrequested justification may seem to be an accusation, but it should be recognized that there are men made of all sorts of clay, and men whose clay is burned and consumed by a perpetual flame. Michelangelo, who sometimes felt the heavy weight of that clay, soared in the world of eternal ideas when he beheld that gentle and youthful beauty. It was a realization, in his sorrowing Christian soul, of the Greek dream of the supreme harmony of body and spirit.

* * *

Vittoria Colonna, when Michelangelo first met her, was well over forty years old. He may have seen her, or heard about her, at the time he had first seen Cavalieri, when he went from Florence to Rome for a few months, but he became an intimate only a few years later.

The inconsolable widow of the Marchese of Pescara, Ferrante Francesco d'Avalos, a rough soldier unfaithful to her as well as to Italy, had never been a beauty, but she was gifted with

a noble spirit and great intelligence before which bowed men of letters, prelates, and all who knew her. After the death of her husband she lived an almost monastic life, and the years that remained to her she consecrated to the cult of his memory, and to that memory she dedicated her poetry. She refused every new proposal of marriage. She kept up a correspondence with Marguerite of Navarre and Queen Renée. Charles V, passing through Rome, visited her. The young, even from afar, came under her singular spell.

Dedicated to religious practices, first in Naples and on the island of Ischia, then in Rome, she gathered around her (and around another woman, less talented but more beautiful, Juliette Gonzaga, whom the pirate Barbarossa tried to kidnap from the castle of Fondi) propagators of new ideas such as Ochino, the eloquent and uncompromising monk, Giovanni Valdes and his disciple Pietro Carnesecchi, and cardinals, such as Contarini and Reginald Pole, who were endeavoring to bring about reforms in the bosom of the Church on the one hand and conciliation with her opponents on the other.

These learned gatherings soon acquired an air of conspiracy. Vittoria Colonna's high social standing and her fame as a poet had brought her many interesting friendships, but when she met Michelangelo she had a revelation of the power of his genius and the depths of his spirit. She perceived that the great artist was a great man, greater than all the others. "Those who admire the works of Michelangelo," she would say, "admire only the least part of him." Perhaps something of the sublime mystery that was in the depths of that soul incapable of finding peace on earth and which left others stunned and terrified and always uncomprehending revealed itself only to her.

The great artist responded to that lofty friendship with intense affection. He portrayed her, transfigured, as the Woman of Samaria, a picture now lost. He dedicated to her whole garlands of Petrarchian sonnets and madrigals. He said that he "had been born a rough model of himself and that he had been made over and polished by her." Vittoria Colonna and Cavalieri had

become his friends at the same time and absorbed him completely.

It was Vittoria's custom to spend many hours of the afternoon with her following in the church of San Silvestro at Quirinale, near Montecavallo and not far from Macel dei Corvi. Tomaso Cavalieri also went there. They listened to the Epistles of St. Paul read from the pulpit by a learned friar, then they discussed them. Michelangelo sometimes joined them there when, in order to escape from the obsession of the Last Judgment, he permitted himself a walk in the company of the faithful Urbino through the still lonely places between ruins and vineyards. He was not an assiduous visitor at these meetings but he was the most eagerly listened to. The Marchesa at that time gave particular importance to her pious afternoon gatherings and succeeded in skillfully leading Michelangelo, who was always very reserved, from the field of theology to that of art, where everyone had something to learn from him.

Francesco d'Olanda, a young Portuguese painter and miniature artist, who was traveling in Italy and who had succeeded in getting himself accepted by the Marchesa's circle, listened to Michelangelo during those conversations and wrote up the discourses in four *Dialogues* which he later published in book form. He emphasized especially what Michelangelo thought about the art of design, Flemish painting, and the fate of art in Italy.

Michelangelo was a severe critic of Flemish painting, which he described as being without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion, without discernment or choice, in short, without substance and force, but we do not know whether or not this negative criticism owes something of its substance to the reporter. Michelangelo said that Flemish painters, in trying to do many things well, all of them difficult in themselves, succeeded in doing none of them well; and of Flemish art, "which causes more tears to be shed than Italian art," he said, "it appeals to women, especially to the very old and to the very young, as well as to monks, nuns, and gentlemen who lack a sense of harmony." He considered any good painting to be Italian, even

when it originated outside of Italy. And he added, "Tell a young Italian pupil to make a sketch and he will produce a better one than a foreign master."

In talking about drawing he liked to repeat the words of Donatello to his disciples: "I tell you everything there is to know about sculpturing when I tell you to draw."

One day, when the conversation turned unexpectedly upon the manner of painting the most sacred subjects, his words were few and clear. He wanted all princes, secular and ecclesiastic, to take every care and promulgate laws so that the portrayal of Christ and of the Virgin Mary be entrusted only to a great artist. He said, "In order to give an idea of the image of Jesus it is not enough that an artist be a great painter; he must also live a pure life and be almost a saint."

* * *

Vittoria fell into disgrace with the Vatican. Her circle was accused of heresy by the Inquisition, which, from Spain, was spreading its black shadow upon the Roman Church. Her friends among the Cardinals, one or another of whom she had dreamed of seeing at the head of Christianity, were, instead, banished and persuaded, or forced, to see the error of their ways. Held in suspicion, spied upon by the Inquisition, she shut herself up in a convent in Viterbo, where her ardor for liberty and truth slowly spent themselves, and where she forgot and even disowned her friends.

Aging and changed, she kept up a faithful correspondence with Michelangelo and sometimes came secretly to Rome to see him. She wrote him long letters exhorting him to spiritual wisdom and separation from the world, and begged him to preserve her image in his heart, transfigured by faith, like the Woman of Samaria, in whose likeness he had painted her. She sent him a small parchment book containing a hundred and eight sonnets that she had written. The man who always kept aloof from the world replied spiritually and affectionately. He too sometimes went to see her. He always kept the little book of

verses and in his heart the image of the Woman of Samaria. The separation did not make him suffer acutely; it gave him, in fact, a feeling of gentle regret, that sad intoxication which his spirit loved in order to live intensely. And Tomaso Cavalieri always stayed close by him.

At home he enjoyed the company of young Francesco Amadori, or Urbino, as he called him, the pupil who was his companion and who became his son. He had taken him into his house when he was still almost a child, brought him up, educated him, giving him a house, possessions, and a good wife.

CHAPTER XXII

20 UPON THE COMPLETION of Pope Sixtus' Chapel, Paul III thought of commissioning Michelangelo to do another great fresco, opposite the wall of the Last Judgment, which would portray the expulsion of Lucifer from Paradise; then, having had the Pauline Chapel built for himself, he decided to have him paint this, instead. Michelangelo entered it in 1542 and was not to leave it until 1550. There he depicted the crucifixion of St. Peter and the conversion of St. Paul. Another eight years of work, from his sixty-sixth to his seventy-fifth year.

Painting is not an art for the old, the master confided to his new disciple, Vasari, least of all the painting of frescoes. The old man completed, with the last great scenes, the cycle of his awe-inspiring Biblical portrayals; here he gave his last lesson in tumultuous movement and powerful pictorial plasticism. Those who followed him lost no time in distorting it in absurd exaggeration and senseless gesticulation. He had said all he had to say in the language of color, an art he had learned almost unwillingly. He had realized the great dream that a spirit of emulation had inspired in him long ago in the cartoon for the Palazzo Vecchio. Cellini always considered it Michelangelo's greatest drawing. Even the dash and the spirited foreshortening of the Sistine and Pauline Chapels did not equal it in vigor and strength. None-

theless, it is in these frescoes that his thought found its most powerful and significant expression.

He never completely forsook sculpturing. There were always some blocks of marble in the overgrown gardens of Macel dei Corvi. He sought to escape commissions and took to carving again for his amusement. He needed to handle the mallet in order to feel vigorous, alive. But at the contact with marble his impatience grew. It seemed as though with the years all capacity for patient waiting had been lost by that long-suffering spirit which had always imprisoned its inspiration in meditation, an inspiration that had lasted, throughout the long years, enclosed in his long colloquies with the David, the Moses, the Night, and the Slaves. God had given to this spirit so intolerant of limitations the most limited of all the arts.

He attempted to mitigate that intolerance with poetry. He no longer thought of publishing in volumes the poems he had selected from so many others that he burned, but he continued to write some every day. They would be published later by those who found them among his papers. Meantime the Flemish musician Arcadelt, master of the choirboys of St. Peter's, and the Roman Carlo Festa, and Concilion set some of his madrigals to music. One of his sonnets was commented on by Benedetto Varchi in a learned discourse at the Florentine Studio. Donato Giannotti refers to him as a great critic of poetry and politics in his *Dialogues on Dante*. In fact, Michelangelo is the sole speaker in these *Dialogues*; the others act only as chorus. He wanted to learn Latin, which he did not know, but feared that at seventy the task would be difficult and the effort unrewarding. Extremely erudite himself, he always preferred the company of men of letters and other cultivated men to the society of artists, a rude and uncultured group.

Henceforth he would devote himself to architecture. God would grant him enough time to say in the field of architecture what had not yet been said by the great architects who had lived and worked before him, Leon Battista Alberti, Brunellesco, Bramante, Sangallo. His deep religious sentiment inevitably led

him to architecture, for only in architecture could it find its highest expression. Within a few years Paul III was to appoint him chief architect of St. Peter's.

Michelangelo was on the best of terms with this Pope also, and he ended by obtaining from him everything he wanted, just as the Pope could obtain from him whatever he wanted or needed. Michelangelo had not liked him at first because he knew of the shiftless life Farnese had led as a cardinal and of his immoderate affection for his sons and nephews, but the pontiff had opened with largesse the coffers of the Vatican to artists. He had paid particular attention to the building of St. Peter's, which had been neglected by Leo and abandoned altogether by Clement, and this Michelangelo appreciated above all. Fame and years had given him a freedom of intercourse that he had not allowed himself with the other pontiffs. He went to the Vatican at any hour that pleased him and boasted of having often spoken to the Pope with his hat on.

He confided to Francesco d'Olanda: "Even His Holiness tires and annoys me sometimes when he talks to me and bothers me to find out why I don't go to see him. I believe I serve him better by not accepting all his invitations, especially as I myself have no desire to visit him. I believe that in doing this I serve him as befits Michelangelo, instead of standing up before him all day long as others do. I have more regard for his service than for his person, which has no need of me."

The Pope and Michelangelo exchanged presents as equals. Michelangelo's nephew Leonardo sent him every year, at vintage time, a cask of Trebbiano wine, and he regularly made a present of twenty or thirty bottles of it to Paul III, who apparently greatly enjoyed the wines of the Tuscan hills.

When he was painting the Last Judgment the Pope often went to see him at work, accompanied by his master of ceremonies, Monsignor Biagio da Cesena. At the sight of so many nudes of both sexes, nudes blessed and nudes damned, the worthy master of ceremonies, scandalized to the depths of his being, was the first to make the criticism that so many others

were to make after him. Michelangelo made no reply. He was not one to answer, except with a joke or with sarcasm. He did not put in his paintings portraits of his contemporaries, but he made an exception of the good ecclesiast and portrayed him as a devil, the royal devil, Minos. Monsignor Biagio recognized himself and protested to the Pope.

Paul III was amused. He replied facetiously to his master of ceremonies: "If he had put you in Purgatory I could have interceded and taken you out, but in Hell there is no redemption and I can do nothing for you."

The fresco was uncovered, and protests similar to those of the master of ceremonies poured in. Such a display of nudity of saints and virgins seemed the very peak of irreverence and indecency in a sacred place. Murmurs, criticisms, and accusations spread from the Vatican to the city, from the city to all Italy; from ecclesiastic circles the scandal spread to artistic circles and to every meeting place of gossips. Even the disciples who were most devoted to Michelangelo this time were not on his side.

Pietro Aretino was among the first to seize on the scandal and to launch from his lectern a crusade against the profaner and the sacrilege.

Michelangelo had replied to his previous letter, so full of advice about the painting of the Last Judgment, with cold and elusive courtesy. He laughed at so much conceit and went on his way. In order to be rid of him, for Aretino was a dangerous man to have as an enemy, he promised him drawings. Everyone asked him for drawings, for they were sought after as priceless rarities, but he gave them only to his friends, hiding and burning as many as he could. Those who succeeded in snatching some from the fire sold them for a high price. He promised some to Aretino, then forgot his promise and made him wait ten years for them. When the fresco was finished the divine master black-mailer wrote again, heaping more high-flown flattery on a picture he had not seen and thanking Heaven "with eyes full of tears" that he had been permitted to assist at this miracle of art.

Michelangelo neither answered nor made up his mind to send the drawings. Benvenuto Cellini came to get them in the name of that "Scourge of Princes." Even Titian, Aretino's protector and painter, who had come to Rome at that time to paint Paul III's portrait, asked him for some. Michelangelo rolled up a few old drawings he had planned to throw away, and sent them to Venice. No one had ever dared treat in such a way the man who was feared by all and who rode at the right of Charles V. Unfortunately, Aretino had just seen an engraving of the last Judgment, and the writer of obscenities, shocked to the bottom of his putrid soul by the display of nudity, again took up his pen to pour forth accusations, insults, and threats on Michelangelo.

"Is it possible that you, who do not deign to consort with men, since you are divine, have done this in the greatest temple of God, upon the highest altar of Christ, in the most sacred chapel on earth, where the mighty hinges of the church, the venerable priests, the Vicar of Christ, with universal ceremonies, sacred orders, and holy orisons, gather to confess, to contemplate and worship His body, His flesh, and His blood? Were it not unseemly to introduce the comparison, I should boast that I had done better in my treatise on the Nenna, and I should prefer my prudence to your conscious indiscretions, for even in lascivious and immodest matters I use well-chosen and decorous words and speak in terms both chaste and above reproach. And you, with a subject of such glorious history, display angels and saints without a vestige of earthly modesty and deprived of celestial ornament. Even the pagans, when they made statues—I do not mean a clothed Diana but a naked Venus—made her cover with a hand that which should not be seen, and here someone who claims to be a Christian, who holds art in higher regard than faith, considers it a royal spectacle to show indecorousness in virgins and martyrs as well as to show the damned dragged to hell by their genitals, a sight not fit even for a brothel."

And all this time the bashful Aretino was agitating for a cardinal's hat in worthy emulation of Bembo, who, swollen with pride, had just obtained one from Paul III.

According to Aretino if only Michelangelo had followed the advice so gratuitously given he would have produced a work so magnificent "that Providence, which governs all things, would have looked after it so long as order lasted in its government of the spheres."

Aretino continued with allusions to the malicious gossip about his friendship with Tomaso Cavalieri and other young men, accusations of having defrauded the treasure left him by Julius II and a proposal that Paul III cover the Judgment, and concluded with an added provision that renewed the blackmail: either pay or I shall continue. "Now that I have vented some of my rage against your cruel disregard of my devotion, and have shown you that although you may be divine, I am not made of water, tear this up, for I have done the same, and remember that Kings and Emperors reply to my letters."

Kings and Emperors may have replied, but Michelangelo did not. And he paid nothing. As usual the libelist Aretino did not tear up the letter. On the contrary, he showed it widely so that all might read it. While the Council of Trent was meeting and the Holy Inquisition worked swiftly, the accusation of impiety, spreading among the clergy, could have far-reaching consequences and end in fire, if not for the artist at least for his work. Michelangelo escaped, as did his painting, because of the Pope's protection.

But it was the period of persecutions, and the Last Judgment was not entirely spared. Within about ten years another Pope, Paul IV, had the most prominent nudes—angels, virgins, and saints—veiled and covered, entrusting the task to Daniele da Volterra, a disciple of Michelangelo's who did it with great respect for the work of the master.

Michelangelo shrugged his shoulders. Let His Holiness attend to putting the world in order, for the rearranging of a painting was a trifling matter.

* * *

Years before he had had an accident while painting the Last Judgment. He had fallen from the platform and dislocated a hip.

He would not permit a surgeon to touch him. He had himself carried to his house by his assistants and locked himself up. Any other man would have suffered from such a dislocation; he felt only resentment and anger and concealed his hurt as one conceals a disgrace. But his assistants reported the matter to Boccio Rontini, an exiled Florentine doctor, who was one of his good friends. The doctor knocked at his door, but Michelangelo neither let him in nor answered him. With the help of the assistants, the doctor climbed a ladder to a window, breaking the glass, and, after having searched for him in every room, found the wounded old lion in his lair.

He fell ill again in 1544. His friend Luigi del Riccio, steward of the Strozzi family, succeeded in removing him from Maccl dei Corvi and taking him to his own house, where he could look after him properly, where prelates and noblemen could visit him, and where Pope Paul sent every day to inquire about his health.

Luigi del Riccio was extremely fond of him and after the death of Angiolini looked after his affairs. The entire Strozzi family, rivals of the Medici, showered him with care and attention. He, for his part, from the very first Florentine years, had always had a great affection for them. Ambitious and lazy, they were no better than the Medici, but now they personified oppressed liberty. Their sons were fighting and dying for freedom, and Michelangelo was grateful to them. In gratitude he made a present to Roberto Strozzi, one of the sons of Filippo, of the two statues of the Slaves for which there was now no place in Pope Julius' small mausoleum.

He had a relapse of the same malady two years later, and this time the attack was more serious. It turned out to be gallstone, and after having subjected him to a lengthy water cure the doctor succeeded in saving him. He never had any other serious illness, but recurrent attacks of gallstone were periodically to afflict his old age. He continued to avoid doctors because, he said, he had more faith in prayers than in medicine. His nephew Leonardo, alarmed, went to find him and he received him coldly, then wrote him a furious letter.

"I have been ill and you, at the instance, no doubt, of Ser Giovan Francesco, have come to hasten my demise and to see if I have left you anything. Is there not enough of mine in Florence to suffice you? You cannot deny that you resemble your father, who turned me out of my own house in Florence. Know that I have made a will in such a way that you need no longer think about what I have in Rome. Go then, with God's blessing, and do not appear before me again, do not write to me again, and act like the priest in the fable."

The process of aging sometimes reveals in us the characteristics of our fathers in our expressions, gestures, words, and manners, just as the falling leaves reveal in the tree the basic structure of the species. In Michelangelo, aging and already suffering from the paternal mania, Messer Lodovico was coming to life once more.

When he was well again he had a most uncharacteristic whim: he would give himself up to mad folly. To Luigi del Riccio, who had gone to France to join the Strozzi, he wrote: "I should prefer to spend what little I have in hostelries than to hole up in Rome like a tramp. I am inclined, if nothing happens, to go to San Jacopo di Galizia after Easter."

He did not go to San Jacopo di Galizia, nor did he squander in hostelries the money he had saved; indeed, he continued to earn more and save more than before, living in the poorest way possible, denying himself even the most harmless pastimes and elementary comforts. He renamed his *Macel dei Corvi* (crows) *Macel of the Poor*, and sent his savings to his nephew so that the latter could continue to pile stone upon stone. That too was a way of building.

CHAPTER XXIII

20 WHEN HE WAS CURED he felt a new vigor. Convalescence is like a return of youth. He was glad to live again, to turn with zest to his work. To his nephew he wrote, so that he would not count too much on his approaching death: "On the whole, I feel

as I did at thirty." And to his friend Fattucci, sending him verses he called "trifles," he revealed, jokingly, the contradiction of his innermost being: "You will say that I am an old fool, and I tell you that in order to remain healthy and serene there is no better way than folly."

His scorn and bad temper were for a time dispelled by his good humor. Good humor, in Michelangelo, be it understood, was the bitter, derisive, and gloomy good humor with which he enshrouded the constant presence of death. A mere nothing suffices to amuse anyone who finds his pleasure in melancholy. Although temperate, he drank the sharp Trebbiano of the sparse Tuscan vineyards. And he ate the early fruits and the confections that del Riccio sent him. The year that Cecchino Bracci died was indeed a year of orgies for him, almost like a funereal and propitiatory feast.

Cecchino Bracci was a young man, gentle of aspect and mind, very dear to del Riccio. Michelangelo also took pleasure in looking at and listening to him, and often went to his friend's house to see him. He was not the only one, for others also gathered in del Riccio's house to admire Cecchino Bracci.

He died at sixteen, and it was as though the light of that literary group had been extinguished. Del Riccio was overcome with grief, and it seemed to him as though the whole world should mourn with him. He wanted to erect a tomb for his young friend and asked Michelangelo to design one. He also asked him for an epitaph, and Michelangelo sent his friend whole bouquets of epitaphs. He enjoyed writing them, in his moments of relaxation, especially at night, as he had always enjoyed covering papers with pen or charcoal drawings that were never transferred to walls or stone and took form only in his imagination. He sent his friend funereal quatrains, and his friend sent him culinary delicacies.

* * *

His friendship with del Riccio and his intimacy with the Strozzi were certainly no mystery in Florence, where ill-wishers were working toward his undoing. Whoever was not a

friend of the Medici was an enemy of Florence. Cosimo, the boy who had become a duke at sixteen, perhaps did not have the muddled mind of his predecessor; he was, in fact, considerably more astute. He had within a few years consolidated his dynasty so that the duchy was soon to become a grand duchy, and it almost became a kingdom. Bans, as well as acts of vengeance, were increased against exiles. The secret understanding between Michelangelo and the conspirators of the Strozzi house were reported to him. His suspicions reached the ears of Leonardo, who wrote his uncle about them.

This time again, as in 1513 after the sack of Prato and the return of the Medici, the fear of political persecutions against his family, his possessions, his work, affected Michelangelo and broke his courage.

Although he was far from his native soil, an exile too, albeit voluntarily, political passion had not died in his heart, but if he saw that that passion could harm his art and his family, he suppressed it.

Humiliation, then the realization of the cowardice to which he had succumbed, made him experience sufferings that rendered him irascible and misanthropic. The wound that he dealt to his own pride found no relief in thoughts of peace, and did not heal. Instead, there followed even more violent rebellion against those who had forced him into lying and against himself for having lied. He had made a present to the Strozzi such as he had never made to anyone else, that of the Slaves, which he loved above all his possessions, and the Strozzi had given them to Francis I. Michelangelo too had respect and sympathy for the King of France, who seemed to him chivalrous and unhappy. Francis I, beaten by Charles V, was plotting revenge and the revenge of Francis I would again mean the expulsion of the Medici. Thus he could, like all the émigrés, look upon His Most Christian Majesty as the liberator of his enslaved country. A saying current at that time was: "Open the heart of a Florentine and there you will find a lily of gold."

Francis I had sent him Primaticcio, his own court painter,

with a personal letter, to ask him for some work from his hand. He replied to Francis I as follows:

"Sacred Majesty,

"I cannot tell whether gratification or wonderment fills me the more at Your Majesty's deigning to write to such as I, and in addition to ask things that are not worthy of the name of Your Majesty, but be that as it may, I beg Your Majesty to know that I have for a long time desired to serve you, but have not had the occasion, owing to your not being in Italy, so I have been unable to do so. Now I am old, and shall be for some months occupied with work for Pope Paul. But if after this, time is still left to me, I shall endeavor to fulfill the desire, which, as I have said, has long been my wish, that is to fashion something in marble, something in bronze, and something in oils. And if death interferes with this desire of mine, and if it is possible to carve or paint in another life, I shall not fail to do so once there in that abode where one no longer grows old."

Later, by other means, he made the King of France understand that if he freed Florence from the tyranny of the Medici, he would put up a bronze equestrian statue of him in the Piazza della Signoria.

* * *

Cosimo I then began summoning him back to Florence, making him generous offers, and he wrote back, thanking him and promising to return as soon as he had finished the works on which he was engaged. But he had no desire to keep his promise.

Cellini intervened. He loved and admired Michelangelo as his first and only master, and he fought spiritedly on his behalf in Florence against that Baccio Bandinelli who, after Michelangelo's departure, had been left a clear field and now monopolized the good graces of the Medici. After the ugly Hercules and Cacus group Bandinelli, who, according to Cellini, was very ugly himself, made other monstrosities which the Duke liked and which his Duchess liked even more. Neither Benvenuto's acrid criticisms nor the example of his own work (the Perseus

had just been cast) succeeded in affecting or undermining Baccio's position with the Medici: he had become the official sculptor for family and state.

Michelangelo realized this. He had a high regard for Benvenuto as a sculptor and considered him the greatest goldsmith he had ever known. Nonetheless, when he received a letter from Benvenuto, who, in the name of the Duke, made him tempting offers, amplifying them with his own admiring comments, he did not reply. The Duke took offense and was unable to conceal his resentment, but he persisted in sending invitations to Michelangelo.

Then Benvenuto made a trip to Rome. After having kissed the feet of the Holy Father, he went to Macel dei Corvi to pay his respects to Michelangelo. Anyone from Florence was always a welcome guest unless he came to quarrel or complain, or was a false mendicant friar or a swindler who pretended to be an artist, as sometimes happened. The master was always cordial toward Benvenuto, but when the latter mentioned the Duke he looked him straight in the eye and said:

"And you, Benvenuto, are you pleased with the Duke?"

Michelangelo knew about his difficulties. Benvenuto tried to parry, said he was satisfied, that he was well treated, and that Michelangelo would be treated even better if he would only return to Florence, which was governed, he told him, "by a very just lord, possessor of more laudable virtues than any other prince in the world"—a hyperbole typical of Cellini.

Michelangelo smiled and let him leave without promising him anything. He reported the results of his mission to the Duke, excusing himself for having been unable to do better. Cosimo listened to him, fuming darkly, then shrugged his shoulders:

"The loss is his."

But he did not admit defeat. It became a point of honor for him, for his family, for his duchy, to bring back to Florence the Great Exile, the greatest glory of the city. The presence of Michelangelo in Florence would have given the greatest artistic luster to his dynasty of merchants, wiping out the original blem-

ish of despotism. It is part of the policy of a tyrant to exalt a great artist in the hope of winning his support. Cosimo freely exercised that policy with men of genius, who in Tuscany were always numerous. Many returned. Even Varchi, who in exile had been the preceptor of the Strozzi, had returned.

Michelangelo must be brought back at any price. Cosimo later sent to him another of his pupils and admirers, Giorgio Vasari, who was, even more than Cellini, under obligation to the Medici and something of a factotum; but neither praises nor flatteries, nor the enticing offers of Vasari had the power to allure him. Let the Duke keep Baccio Bandinelli—"Buaccio" (silly ass), as Benevenuto called him.

Cosimo wrote him personal letters, deferential and wheedling. He finally sent him his son, and the son of the Duke Cosimo stood, respectfully, hat in hand, in the presence of Michelangelo.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN 1544 Vittoria Colonna returned to Rome, where she hoped to recover from an illness contracted in Viterbo. But she did not get well. There she found new causes for worry and sorrows. Her circle of friends had been broken up by persecutions. Besides, she would probably no longer have understood them. Michelangelo only remained. None of her numerous family was left. The Colonnas had been the most powerful family in Rome. Leo X and Clement VII had fought them in vain, but Paul III, with more effective weapons furnished him by the Emperor and the Inquisition, had scattered them. The impoverished and deserted gentlewoman, who was now homeless, was taken into the cloister of Sant' Anna, then into the Cesarini household, where she died three years later.

Michelangelo at that time worked little and suffered much. These were the years of his painful illnesses, when rumors of his death were often spread in Florence. He tried to alleviate his

own sufferings by looking after his friend's. He often went to see her, and they took up again, more intimately, the conversations of their little circle at San Silvestro al Quirinale. They discussed art, religion, truth. Together they read the Scriptures. He was her gentle and melancholy companion during her last days and, seated at her bedside, was present during her last moments. He listened to her last serious and soothing words and to the great silence of the hour of death. Then he kneeled and kissed her hand. He regretted that he had not also kissed her on the forehead or cheek. He experienced remorse at not having made for her a work of art in painting or sculpture in which posterity could see a thousand years later the great affection that had bound him to this great lady.

He had done only small things for her, the Woman of Samaria, a crucifix, a Descent from the Cross—under which he had written a line from Dante: "None can know how much blood it costs." The inquisitive tried to see Vittoria Colonna in the Mother of Christ, beautiful and sad, painted close to her terrifying Son in the Last Judgment. But if that were she, she could only be a Vittoria Colonna completely transformed, like the Medici in the Laurentian tombs.

For many days the death of his beloved friend left him stunned and insensible to anything else. Ordinarily he forgot his sorrows in work; sad thoughts and memories disappeared when he labored to the point of exhaustion, but the paintings in the Pauline Chapel now failed to produce the fire that ordinarily consumed all his troubles. He wrote to the good Fattuci: "Death has taken from me a great friend"—and this was three years later.

* * *

Now, at seventy-five, youth came again to the man who had thought his life was over—a youth that played with fire.

He fell in love with a beautiful Roman woman, "wild and unconquerable," and this hopeless love, which perhaps none of his friends suspected, he confided to his last poems. He thought that he had come to terms with "the weight of his years and his

white head" when suddenly a new beauty sprang before him, "to spur him on, to whip him, to put him in a frenzy," to bleed him drop by drop. In old age love is, or should be, like a fire surrounded by ice "which destroys itself and flickers and does not blaze!" But fire still burned within him. He wanted to flee from the beauty, but he could not; he sought her out and followed her. He tried to reason on the duties and needs of his years but could not, for reason flees when one is beside oneself. He had fallen in love thousands of times throughout his long life, always to suffer. Now he had neither the time nor the wisdom to come to his senses. But he was neither sensible nor wise, then or later, and "to say that it is shameful, when one is old, to love a thing divine, is to lie."

The lady looked at the imploring old man and laughed. This was a great artist—perhaps she knew it, perhaps she had only heard it said—a great artist who could make a great statue of her, an immortal marble statue, but in her unperceiving eyes he was only an ugly and bitter old man. He had never been handsome, but even he had once had, long ago, the grace of youth. Now, with that flat-nosed faunlike mask on a withered body misshapen by toil, he was almost repugnant: "My face inspires fright."

Horror, and if not horror, it could be only pity that he inspired in a woman's heart. It could never be love. And he who had always considered his ugliness a mark of shame and a reproach and had laughed at it and mocked those who taunted him with it, wished jokingly that he could change roles with the unfeeling beauty—she would become ugly and he handsome, he would scorn her and she would be infatuated with him—but then he felt the cruel contrast between the beauty for whose love he so longed and his own ugliness, and he touched the depths of despair.

"Who feeds on death never dies." In that immortality the perpetual renewal of youth was fatal, and with these renewals of youth, the haunting company of death left him for a while only to come back, more pressing and tyrannical, brought back by the very flow of life itself.

He had fallen to earth from the sphere of eternal ideas. This last fall must certainly have been the most painful, but it was also the briefest, "for enjoyment, when one is old, lasts but little time." Back again from earth in the heaven of eternal ideas he found God:

Now hath my life across a stormy sea,
Like a frail bark, reached that wide port where all
Are bidden, ere the final reckoning fall
Of good and evil for eternity.

Now know I well how that fond phantasy
Which made my soul the worshipper and thrall
Of earthly art is vain; how criminal
Is that which all men seek unwillingly.

Those amorous thoughts which were so lightly dressed,
What are they when the double death is nigh?
The one I know for sure, the other dread.

Painting nor sculpture now can lull to rest
My soul, that turns to his great love on high,
Whose arms to clasp us on the cross were spread.*

* * *

After Vittoria Colonna, those who were dearest to him also died. His brother Gian Simone died on January 9, 1548; his other brother, Gismond, on November 13, 1555; and on the third of December of the same year, the faithful Urbino.

Urbino died in his arms, and it was as though death also held him in her embrace, he who was so much older. Irascible and shut against the curious who tried to violate the intimacy of his affections, this death weakened him. He wanted to confide to everyone his unhappiness, the grief that he no longer had the strength to contain.

He mentioned this in a letter to Vasari: "You know how Urbino died. It was the greatest grace of God to me, but also my great grief and sorrow. The grace is that while alive he kept me

* Translation by J. A. Symonds.

alive; in dying he taught me how to die, not with displeasure but with a desire for death. For twenty-six years I had him, and found him true and faithful; and now that I had made him rich and that I expected him to be the support and mainstay of my old age he has left me, and the only hope that remains to me is that I shall see him in Paradise. And of this God has sent me a good omen through the blessed death which he granted him; and what grieved him more than dying was leaving me alive in this treacherous world filled with so many troubles; and yet the better part of me has gone with him; nor is aught left to me but infinite misery."

Urbino was a mediocre being. Michelangelo had wasted his time and breath in teaching him drawing and modeling; he had been nothing but a source of vexation to him, and he had been unable to obtain anything better for him than the modest post of beadle in the chapels of the Vatican. As a man he had perhaps other merits, but he was vulgar. Benvenuto Cellini, in his jealous affection for the master, on the day that he first saw Urbino and heard him speak, registered disgust and scorn. Pietro Aretino was less squeamish. He collected the malicious gossip that was rife in Rome and spread it about busily. Michelangelo could have countered with the answer he had once given the Duke of Urbino: that he had fashioned a Michelangelo in his own image; but he did not reply. He continued to raise and love the boy who had grown to manhood, married, become a father, and who was to have been the support of his old age. He was mediocre and crude but faithful and obedient, and a father does not always see the mediocrity and crudeness of his son, or, if he does see it, tolerates it.

Michelangelo made life comfortable for him. He held one of his sons, who was named Michelangelo, at the baptismal font. Then he helped his widow Cornelia with money and presents of drawings and sketches which she sold for a high price to the Duke of Urbino. Back in her native Marche, Cornelia always remembered her old benefactor with little homely gifts, and he continued to help her, even when, in spite of his disapproval,

she remarried a first and a second time, each time badly. He asked her to entrust the little Michelangelo to him. He would have taken him to Florence (he was then thinking of abandoning everything in Rome because a new Spanish menace was threatening, and of returning to his native city for good), and loved him more than Leonardo's son, and he would have taught him what he knew. To teach someone what he knew was his secret dream, which was never realized.

And the small Michelangelo Amadori was the only relative, or near relative, bearing that great name who survived him.

* * *

The deaths of his two brothers grieved him less, for he did not really miss them, but their deaths were nonetheless a source of grief to him because of his strong family feeling. For what purpose had he worked so many years and earned so much money? He always told first his brothers, then his nephew, that he was saving up only for himself, that he was buying houses and farms for his old age, when he would have time to rest, and he had said, in his most aggressive manner: "I tell you that I want to proceed slowly, for I have earned my money with so much weariness that no one such as you can know it." He was already old, yet he continued to work as at first, to earn, to save, to purchase lands and houses, and not to rest.

He owned houses in Via Ghibellina, in Via dei Servi, at Porta Rossa, and he wanted to purchase more in the better sections of the city. He had farms in Settignano, San Miniato al Tedesco, in the Chianti, at Monte Spertoli, at Possolatico, outside Porta al Prato, and he continued to purchase them in the most fertile parts of Tuscany. The Pozzolatico farm he had given in dowry to his niece Francesca, who married Michele Guicciardini. Every time that his nephew went to see him in Rome, he threw him out and threatened to cut him out of his will, but he knew very well that all he acquired and accumulated was for his nephew. For this reason he wanted to find him a wife.

At his nephew's age, placed between two needs, love and

art, he had chosen art. But he had been foolish, and his nephew must be wise. For this reason he wanted him to take a wife and urged and helped him to look for one, for he was in a hurry. He wanted her to be poor rather than rich, religious but not bigoted; let her be portionless but well educated so that he would not be obliged to show off and commit follies. And "be provident for others as others have been for you, but you find yourself rich without knowing how to acquire riches. I don't want to dwell on the misery in which I found our family when I started to help them, for it would fill a volume and I have been repaid nothing but ingratitude." He wanted her to be honest, modest, and what matter if she were beautiful or ugly; she must above all be noble, as befitted the last descendant of a noble and ancient line.

Michelangelo had always been proud of the ancient nobility of his family, but now, old and laden with glory, his fame assured for thousands of years, he made of his ancient lineage his chief title to honor. He knew that his name was universally famous and needed neither title nor honors. While at first he signed his letters "Michelagnuolo scultore," now he signed them "Michelagnuolo Buonarrotti" or just "Michelagnuolo"; and if his nephew added, as he sometimes did, the word "scultore," he told him curtly that he was neither sculptor nor painter, nor anything else but Michelangelo and no more. Nonetheless, if he thought that his great name needed no titles it was more because of the ancient nobility of his family than for the glory he had acquired by his art. He wanted that ancient nobility to be respected by everyone. On the day that his brother Gismondo, after a life of adventure, had gone home to Settignano to become no more than a drover behind oxen and plow, he was as angry as if personal affront had been done him. He was a descendant of the Counts of Canossa, and he was proud to tell his nephew that the direct descendant of the family had come to Rome one day to pay him a visit. Imperial blood coursed through his veins. He did some research and found a document, scraps of paper two hundred years old, in which it was written that a "Buonarotti Simoni was listed several times among the lords, then a Simone Buona-

rotti, then a Michele Buonarrotto Simoni, then a Francesco Buonarrotti," and he wanted Leonardo always to add the Simoni after his name.

The pride of the old man, in a strange bond of aristocratic prejudices, led him so far as to think that only young men of noble birth, and not plebeians, should dedicate themselves to painting, sculpture, and architecture, for these were the noble arts.

After five years of searching, Leonardo married a Cassandra Ridolfi, who came from a family of nobles, and his uncle was pleased. Michelangelo gave the bride two gold rings and to the groom the advice to take care of his health, for in general there are more widows than widowers. The first baby born to the young couple was naturally named Michelangelo, but he died in infancy. He wrote his nephew: "You must be patient and consider that it was better for him than if he had died in old age. Continue to live, for without you our holdings, which have cost so much labor, would be without a master."

The second child died, and the third, a girl, died too.

BOOK 5

CHAPTER XXV: THE DESIGN OF ST. PETER'S
CHAPTER XXVI: THE LAST FLIGHT FROM
ROME CHAPTER XXVII: THE LAST PIETÀ



CHAPTER XXV



THE ENCROACHMENT of old age enshrouded the artist in a rising mist that isolated him still more from the company of men, hiding him from view or, at best, revealing only a distorted image to whoever tried to see him through the mist. His daily existence split into two definite parts. In Macel dei Corvi an old misanthrope lived in the midst of cats and chickens and constant domestic turmoil. "The housekeepers are all bitches and pigs! I give them ten julians a month; I live poorly but I pay well." An irritable old recluse who would have nothing to do with doctors and holed himself up in his lair like a wounded animal, spied upon visitors through the keyhole, slept on a straw mattress without removing either his work apron or his spurred boots, systematically refused gifts and invitations to dinner so that finally no one invited him any more, hid money in every conceivable hiding place, deprived himself of everything, and quarreled with everyone. Once, in the effort he made to remove his boots, he also removed the skin from his feet, an incident that persuaded him in the future to remove his boots before going to bed.

In the workshop of St. Peter's a sublime genius meditated, dreamed, and suffered, enclosing his suffering, his dream, and his meditation as the bark encloses the core, and to the eyes of the world the latter Michelangelo was concealed by the former.

At eighty, the great man was placed upon a pedestal by his contemporaries, where he willingly assumed the attitude that was to be his in history. Michelangelo at eighty, eighty-five, eighty-nine, remained a man among men. Winds and storms raged about him until the last day of his life. Pietro Aretino died in 1556 of a "cannon shot of apoplexy," as one chronicler wrote, but his followers multiplied like weeds, and the lesser Aretinos

continued to persecute him. Michelangelo was a born fighter, and he did not lay down his arms until death took them from him. The last part of his life was a continual battle.

As soon as he had stopped fighting the della Rovere heirs, and himself, he took up arms against the architects of Rome, and himself.

They knew him to be the greatest artist of Christendom and told him so, and as such he was universally admired to the farthest corners of the earth; but his combative spirit prevented the admiration of his fellows, chilled by his lack of sympathy, from becoming a cult. He had always had but few friends and lived long enough to lose them one by one, and no others came to take their place. There remained Cavalieri, Vasari, Cellini, Ammanati, Daniele da Volterra, Tiberio Calcagini, Annibal Caro, Varchi, and a few others, but they did not all live in Rome. And his disciples seemed made to spoil the work of the master.

The other artists were envious and inept enemies who were unwilling to lay down their arms. They tried to destroy him and succeeded only in poisoning his life with accusations, vituperations, and abuses, incapable as they were of seeing his greatness and respecting it, or even respecting his old age, since he showed them nothing but a scowling face. Old and alone, he held his own against all, old and young, inciting them to battle in order to wipe them out.

Make way for the young!—the cry of every generation moving forward to the battle of life—was raised along all the reaches and by-paths of art against the old man who had become an obstacle. But the old man did not stand aside to let them by. They said he had become childlike because at eighty, at eighty-five, a man can be nothing but a child, an artist can only be finished; and he laughed at them. Sending verses to Vasari, he said: "You will say that I am old and mad to want to write sonnets; but because many say that I am childish I have wanted to keep to my role." This was the exquisite sonnet to God.

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The greatest artist of Christendom, the highest artistic conscience of his time, wanted no rivals.

Paul's architect was Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, indefatigable builder of fortresses who, surrounded by his pupils, had formed a party, a sect, as Michelangelo called it. Now in Rome, he was attending to the building of St. Peter's, the Palazzo Farnese, and the fortifications of Borgo for the Pope and his family. Michelangelo declared war against Sangallo and against the Sangallo sect.

A great deal of progress had already been made on the Palazzo Farnese. Only the courtyard remained to be finished and the cornice put in place. The Pope did not like the plan drawn up by Sangallo, and Michelangelo, who liked it even less, wrote the Pope a letter, long and pitiless, in which, under seven headings of accusations, he pointed out the errors of the plan. It was a lesson in architecture which the Pope understood little—if, boring as the letter was, he read it. For this reason he wanted to hold a contest. Sebastiano del Piombo, Vasari, Perino del Vaga, Raphael's disciple, and Michelangelo himself sent plans. As always, Michelangelo's was chosen.

For this reason also it was impossible to like the old man or to look upon him with respect and detachment. Wherever he went, a desert formed around him. He was old, but always crossing swords with the young, who repaid him as they would a peer, with disrespect and rancor. When the time came to undertake the fortifications of Borgo for the defense of the Vatican that Paul III wanted to hasten because of the perilous times, so that the episode of the imprisonment of Clement in Castel Sant' Angelo might not be repeated, it was Michelangelo again who was called in for advice. Dangers for the papacy and all of Christendom were growing. The French and the Spaniards continued to overrun Italy from north to south and from south to north, ravaging the country, and now from the east the menace of Barbarossa's Turks, who were already invading Otranto, was pressing. Sangallo, Montemellino, Vitelli, and other masters of architecture and artillery were called in to study the ground and to

give their opinion; Michelangelo's opinion was contrary to that of all the others.

Sangallo spat out: "Attend to your sculpture and painting—they are your trade—and don't meddle with fortifications."

And Michelangelo, with his customary sarcasm, replied: "I know little about painting and sculpture, but with my experience I know more about fortifications than you or any of your crew."

Sangallo died before the Farnese palace was completed and the fortifications of Borgo were begun. Paul III immediately appointed Michelangelo superintendent for life of the administration of the buildings of St. Peter—"commissarium, praefectum, operarium et architectum quod vixerit constituimus et deputamus"—with unlimited authority and power to do, undo, enlarge, limit the construction, choose new workers and dismiss the old ones, establish the rate of pay and exact obedience from all.

Because the painting of frescoes is hard work for the old, once the Pauline Chapel was completed he decided not to take up his brushes again or get up on a platform. Sculpture still tempted him, and he needed only to see a beautiful block of marble to feel himself growing young again. But sculpture was the art that had most disappointed him because of adverse circumstances and his overanxious spirit, and every time he saw marble and took up his mallet he was filled with a new sadness. None of the things that he had imagined throughout his long life had he been able to finish. The most limited of arts was also the most dependent on corporeal limitations, and God had granted it to this man whose imagination knew no bounds, who was all spirit. Now that he had dedicated himself to architecture, an art almost without limits, like poetry, he would be able to free in it his spirit and imagination. Bramante was right in his presentiment that Michelangelo was a great architect.

He remained alone—alone and supreme. The death of his rivals and followers left an emptiness around him. After Sangallo, death took Sebastiano del Piombo, Perino del Vaga, the

youthful Pierino da Vinci, Leonardo's nephew, of whom Michelangelo was fond. Art was declining; only he remained. Alone, he stayed and grew greater. Rome, which a few years earlier had been so flourishing, so rich with artists, had become a desert. And in the midst of that desert, isolated, the immense Michelangelesque oak filled the sky with its constant new growth and with the arcane terror of a sacred forest. In a disintegrating society, in an Italy in ruins, he personified the dignity of human labor, the supreme reason of art.

Now that he remained alone, his artistic ambition knew no bounds. He would make great and beautiful things, such as had not been done before. He would leave the stamp of his genius upon every stone. If God had granted him another life besides this one, which already seemed eternal, he would have turned Rome upside down and transformed it from its very foundations. The Colosseum, Marcellus' theater, the other ancient monuments became travertine quarries.

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Michelangelo entered St. Peter's and closed himself in there. He became its master and despot. He wanted no pay for his work. The revenue allotted him from the Piacenza bridge over the Po had been contested more than once while the city passed from one lord to another—from the Farnese to the Trivulzios to the Pusterlas; he had finally lost, but he was not lacking in other sources of income. And if the Popes made him an allowance from their own pockets, he would accept it, but he would never touch a farthing from the treasure of St. Peter. It was sacred money and he wanted to work only for the love of God. He asked that his renunciation be stipulated in a papal brief. Paul III died in 1549 and was succeeded by Julius III. Julius III died in 1555 and was succeeded, after the very brief reign of Marcello, by Paul IV (Caraffa). He continued to work in St. Peter's only for the love of God. When Paul IV sent him a monthly stipend of one hundred crowns, he returned it.

For this reason he was able to act as dictator and not ac-

count to anyone for his work or his plans. He thought and worked by himself. He began by demolishing everything his predecessors had begun. He went back to Bramante's original plan, which appeared to him to be the "clearest, purest, simplest, and most luminous." Donato Bramante was a wicked man, but as architect he was unequaled by any of his successors. However, in order to follow Bramante's plans, transforming them into Michelangelo's new ideas, the foundations would have to be strengthened. It was necessary to build solid foundations for the temple that was to last as long as mankind.

Every day, in wind and rain, the old man went from Macel dei Corvi to St. Peter's, crossing the city from one end to the other. He wanted to see everything with his own eyes, touch everything with his own hands, examine and evaluate everything with his economical mind. He feared that on the day he did not go a stone would be put in wrong, or poor quality mortar would be bought, or he would be cheated on weight. No one knew what went on in his mind, no one succeeded in probing his thoughts. He already had in his head the plans for the immense cupola that he would raise upon those pilasters to crown the edifice, but he confided his secret to no one. His pupils were there only to carry out orders. The deputies wanted to do more than that: they wanted to know how the money they administered was being spent; but Michelangelo paid no attention to the deputies. Let them send money, protect it from thieves, but let them leave art alone. It was no concern of theirs.

A few went to observe, to try to understand; but they understood nothing, for Michelangelo explained nothing to them. One thought that the windows of the transept did not let in sufficient light, and Michelangelo referred him to the deputies, and the deputies referred him to the pontiff. The Pope went to see for himself and heard the complaints. Michelangelo defied them. "What have the Cardinals to say? Let them speak." The Cardinals spoke; he looked at each in turn.

"And do you know, gentlemen, what windows I shall put above these?"

"You have never told us. . . ."

"I am not obliged to tell anyone what I must and want to do."

This man who was said to be infantile was disconcerting. It was decidedly hard to like him—and he seemed immortal.

* * *

Artists from Germany and Flanders came to see him. This was a great comfort to his old but youthful heart. The Florentine Pier Vettori wrote to the President of the Borghini Academy that the sole object of their trip was to visit him, for they considered him one of the marvels of Rome, and that Michelangelo received them "affectionately and to their satisfaction." Bruciolo came from Venice to renew the invitation of the Most Serene Republic to retire to that city, with an allowance of six hundred crowns and without any obligation to work, but only to honor the Republic by his presence. He knew Titian and admired the magic of his colors while nonetheless reproving him for the poverty of his design. Vasari, who, with the art of the skilled flatterer, knew how to ingratiate himself, continued to bring him from Florence the invitations of Duke Cosimo. Now that the basilica of St. Peter had taken up all of Michelangelo's time and it appeared certain that the great artist would never again return to Florence, the Duke became pressing to the point of being importunate, and his letters to him became truly respectful and affectionate.

Michelangelo replied that he would not abandon St. Peter's until his work had been brought to the point where it would be absolutely impossible for those who would continue it to make any changes. "Were I to leave, it would be the ruin of the edifice; for me a great disgrace in the eyes of Christendom, and a grievous sin against my soul."

Vasari, the courtier, was now sharing the ducal graces with Bandinelli, but if Michelangelo settled in Florence again Vasari, with his support, would easily be able to supplant Bandinelli.

But Michelangelo would not go. From the day that he en-

tered St. Peter's, his religious sentiment deepened into faith in his own mission. He was firmly persuaded that this last work was ordained by God. He wrote to his nephew: "I have always understood that I should not leave here until I had completed the building of St. Peter's so that my plans cannot be spoiled or changed and so that it will be impossible for it to fall into the hands of thieves and rogues, as has happened before; and I have always shown and still show this diligence because many believe, and I do still believe, that God ordered me to do it. But the point of termination that I have set myself for the building has not yet been reached by me. Because I am old and because there is nothing else of mine to leave, I have not wanted to abandon it and because I serve for the love of God and have put all my hopes in Him."

To Vasari he had written: "I know that you realize that at the hour of writing this I have reached my last hours, and no thought comes to me that does not contain death; and may God grant that I may be able to keep it off some years more."

The Duke, after having sent him Cellini, Tribolo, Vasari, and his son, came himself. All honors would be paid him if he returned to Florence: he would be one of the Forty, that is, a Florentine senator. The Pope had had him for so long, surely he could let him have him now, and the Duke watched carefully for days of discontent brought on by troubles or money denied him, in order to tempt him anew; but those were precisely the days that Michelangelo became most attached to the task God had given him. Firm in his resolution not to enter the Duke's service, he wrote only conciliatory words, kinder for Florence than for the Duke: "Then I shall return to Florence with the idea of resting with death, to which, day and night, I am trying to become accustomed, so that it will not treat me worse than other old people." He wanted to lay his old bones next to his father's.

There were other visits. From France came envoys from Catherine de' Medici to ask for an equestrian statue in bronze of Henry II. He promised that he would do the statue the day that he had the strength to, hoping thus to discharge with Catherine

the debt incurred by him in his promise to Francis I, even though he would not be able to erect the statue in the Piazza della Signoria. But he had only the strength to do the drawing, and he entrusted the execution of the work to Daniele da Volterra. Then not even Daniele was able to finish it, and the sorrowing widowed Queen did not see the statue that she had wished to be so lifelike. Daniele died after having cast in bronze only the horse upon which Louis XIII was later placed.

One day Vasari brought him a copy of his *Lives*, which had by then been printed, and among those lives of painters, sculptors, and architects already dead there was the life of Buonarroti, the only living one among them. Because he noticed some inexactitudes and lacunae in that biography, he consented to have Ascanio Condivi write another. The young man from the Marche accomplished little as a painter and had no success whatever, but he was cultivated and highly literate. Michelangelo had admitted Condivi, who was a protégé of Julius III, among his most intimate friends, and now during the winter evenings in Macel dei Corvi, seated in front of the fire, he related deeds and thoughts of his past long life; he almost recited the biography that Condivi wrote from day to day and which was published in 1533.

Giorgio Vasari later became jealous of Condivi. Vasari came from Arezzo, the province in which Michelangelo was born and he considered himself his only authentic interpreter and continuator—in fact, the heir to his artistic legacy. He was not a great artist and, as a man, was weak and vain—"Giorgetto, Giorgino," Benvenuto's cleft tongue called him—but Michelangelo at eighty, although having little esteem for him, could not help but become fond of the man who wielded so much power in Florence and was so useful to him.

Poor Condivi died unfortunately while still young and before he was able to write the other book about Michelangelo that he had in mind. A supplement to his "Life" was added by Gerolamo Ticciati.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BATTLE between the young and the great old man lasted twenty years, and it was the old man who won.

In Florence Baccio Bandinelli continued to lord it over Benvenuto Cellini, who was so superior to him. In Rome the heirs of the Sangallo sect tried to raise their puppet, who was named Nanni di Baccio Bigio against Michelangelo.

Nanni was a clumsy architect who had thrown across the Tiber a bridge so devoid of aesthetic and practical qualities that Michelangelo, crossing it one day on horseback, foretold its approaching end. It was not long in coming. The first time that the river swelled the bridge collapsed. The incompetent builder ought to have been disgraced, but as he was in the good graces of the deputies of St. Peter's, he remained at his post, just as Bandinelli remained in the Tuscan court even after the ignominy of the Hercules and Cacus. This sort of thing often occurs in courts and governments: the more mistakes one makes, the better one is liked. Rulers and tyrants turn the derision of the people in their favor; bankrupts always obtain credit from a bank.

The deputies refused to submit further to Michelangelo's will, even though his authority had been established by the Pope. They preferred the easy docility of Nanni and lent a sympathetic ear to what the envious were saying: that Michelangelo was too old, that he was failing and for that reason the money was being misspent and the work was proceeding too slowly. These complaints came from high prelates, who, beaten before, at every new pontificate renewed the attack only to be silenced by every new pontiff.

Julius III, of the Monte San Savino family, became attached to Michelangelo even more closely than his predecessors had been. They had been fond of him but also feared him; the new Pope venerated him. He began by defending and exalting the artist in his Consistory, in the presence of all the Cardinals. He built nothing that did not have the approbation or the advice of his architect, and had him supervise work entrusted to others. He

asked Michelangelo for plans for a large villa for himself outside Porta del Popolo, for a palace in the city, and for a fountain. He used to say that if Michelangelo were to die before him, he would have him embalmed in order to keep him always near. But the Pope died first.

Cardinal Cervini, one of the deputies of St. Peter's at whom Michelangelo had scoffed in the presence of Pope Julius III, succeeded him. He could have terminated Michelangelo's authority in St. Peter's, but his reign lasted only twenty days. Pope Marcellus left no imprint upon time save the wonderful *Missa Sollemnis* of Pier Luigi da Palestrina composed in his memory.

Giampietro Caraffa, who became Paul IV, then ascended the throne. The volcanic founder of the Theatine Order was eighty ears old, the same age as Michelangelo, and lasted only four years. But in those four years he wanted to turn everything upside down, renovate and persecute Rome, the Papal State, the Church, and his own family. He drove his nephews into exile and heretics into the fire. With equal passion, he hated Spaniards and reformers. He was himself a ghostly image of death and disseminated death wherever he went. He received no one in audience and had no time for art. However, he did not ignore Michelangelo, and he confirmed him in his high office.

Pius IV both knew him and defended him better. He was a member of the Medici of Milan, uncle of Carlo Borromeo, the learned and mundane Cardinal who later became a saint and who at that time, as chief of the Pope's private secretariat, had in his hands the reins of government.

During the reign of Pope Pius IV, Michelangelo's enemies reared their heads again and St. Peter's became once more a nest of vipers. The occasion for the last attack was given by an assassin. It began with Cardinal Carpi's telling the Pope that the buildings were being ruined and that an old man of eighty-five no longer had the strength to continue their direction. Michelangelo wrote the Cardinal a letter in the spirit of his most vigorous years:

"I believe, if I am not deceived, that I can assure you that it

could not go better than it is now going. But perhaps because self-interest and old age can easily deceive me, and thus against my intention harm or prejudice the aforesaid buildings, I intend, as soon as I can, to ask the Holiness of our Lord permission to resign my office, or rather, in order to gain time I wish to beg as I am doing your most illustrious and revered Lordship to permit me to free myself from this encumbrance, at which, as you know, I have willingly worked gratis for seventeen years at the request of several Popes. It is easy to see how much work has been accomplished in the aforesaid buildings during that time. I beg you again to give me leave to go. You could not confer upon me a greater favor. And with every sign of respect, I humbly kiss your illustrious and revered Lordship's hand."

He wrote him another letter to give him a lesson in architecture: "It is certain that the members of a piece of architecture obey the same laws that the members of the human body obey. Whoever is not or has not been a good master of the nude and especially of anatomy cannot understand the principles of architecture."

He wrote a third letter to him and to all the other deputies to protest against the poor lime that they were supplying him: it was a species of sabotage of his work. "I believe that there will be a new league against me. Promises, fees, presents corrupt justice. For this reason I beg you that from this time forward, with that authority I hold from the Pope, you will not accept anything unsuitable, even though it were Heaven-sent; I must not be made to appear partial, for I am not."

All arms broke against this man. He put his faithful man Luigi Gaeta close to Cesare da Casteldurante, overseer of the work, so that Gaeta might take the latter's place when he had to be away. And if the deputies considered Gaeta superfluous, Michelangelo would pay him out of his own pocket. Then one night Cesare was assassinated, and Michelangelo arranged to have his pupil Gaeta take the dead man's place. The innocent Gaeta was accused of theft, and Michelangelo hotly defended him. But the deputies dismissed Gaeta and put in his place their

old favorite Nanni di Baccio Bigio. He was resigned to not being in charge, and was content with that modest position—from which, however, at Michelangelo's death, which nature could no longer defer as it was already the autumn of 1563, he would make the great jump. Michelangelo waited for the Pope, who was going to the Campidoglio to see the work in progress, and asked that his authority be respected. He also wrote the Pope that, if he was no longer wanted in Rome, in St. Peter's, he be given leave to go, “. . . and I shall return to Florence to rest, where the Grand Duke, who has wanted me so much, will rejoice, and I shall finish my days in my own house. . . .”

Pius IV did not grant him leave to go: he again called together the commission of the deputies, and held another hearing. This time the accusers gained the upper hand, for the commission declared that Michelangelo was incapable of finishing the construction. A great many incompetent workers were also against him, as were subcontractors and suppliers, especially those who were losing large profits because of him. Was this the end? It was not. The old man did not surrender: he kept silent against all clamor. This was in September of 1563.

The Pope then sent his nephew Gabrio Serbelloni to see how things stood. The latter, having found that nothing in the building was ruined and everything was proceeding in the best possible way under Michelangelo's guidance, turned Nanni di Baccio Bigio out of St. Peter's.

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Towering above reeds and nettles, the great old man was now crowning his earthly labors with the cupola and was writing the last chapter of the story of a soul—a story that was, at the same time, the story of an epoch, of Italy's slow death. Through him she gave to the world her last message of civilization.

He attended tirelessly to other work. He multiplied himself. He ran from one end of the city to the other, straight in his saddle on the docile old nag that was still able to cut a caper. He went wherever there was something old to be restored, some-

thing new to build, something greater to conceive, as though destiny had granted him the privilege of remaking the face of Rome in the image of his genius. He was the prodigal who wanted to squander the inexhaustible riches accumulated through so many years. He left his imprint upon buildings in the remotest sections of the city. A whole century bore his stamp, and the revolutions of the centuries that followed did not obliterate it.

He went up on the Campidoglio to restore its ancient prestige to that summit of Roman power and, having finished the plans, began the construction of the palaces and of the large staircase. He then had the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, which had been abandoned on the Lateran, placed there. He went into the Baths of Diocletian and there built a new Christian temple, Santa Maria degli Angeli, which Vanvitelli later changed. He went from the ancient walls of Aurelius to the Sacred Mount and drew the plans for the Porta Pia. He thought, grandiosely, of extending the Farnese palace toward the Tiber and, by throwing a bridge over the river, of uniting it to the Farnesina. The Florentine colony and Cosimo, resigned to not having him in Florence, asked him to build a church in Rome in order to realize a desire that had also been Leo X's. Sangallo had begun building it from a design of Jacopo Sansovino. Michelangelo made the model—in fact, he made five of them—of a church that was to be the greatest monument that “either Romans or Greeks ever in their time erected.” But it came to nothing. He redesigned for Vasari and Ammanati the staircase for the Laurentian library, begun long ago and then interrupted. He made a model of it and sent it to Florence. His plans called for a wooden staircase, but this was disregarded and the staircase was made of stone. He helped Ammanati with drawings and advice in erecting a bridge over the Arno, which was to become the exquisite Ponte di Santa Trinità. He designed for Pope Pius' brother a tomb that Leo Leoni later sculptured in the cathedral of Milan. And he scattered drawings and advice among all the pupils who

came to him for help so that his teachings would be spread throughout the world.

But the dominating thought of his last years was the cupola. Upon the temple, which he wanted in the shape of a Greek cross, according to Bramante's original plan (which was not carried out by his successors, who made the usual Latin cross of it), the cupola was to stand out solitary and great. It was to be the realization, against the Roman sky, of the vision that had come to him long ago among the mountains of Carrara. He surrounded it at the base with a crown of double columns and statues. Trouble started soon after work on the great dome had been begun. During one of his absences the workers had badly executed his orders for the construction of a centering, so that it had to be taken down and done over again. The architect lamented: "If it were possible to die of shame and grief, I should not now be alive . . .," and he got up from bed, where the doctor was vainly trying to keep him, to superintend the work.

But if shame and grief do not kill, illness and old age do. Although he tried to arrange the work in the basilica in such a way as to prevent his successors from making changes, nonetheless the completion of the immense cupola was an event that he saw vanishing down the years. It would require the entire life of a man, in addition to what was left of his. And he saw, in the distant future, as through a mist, his thoughts deformed; but who could collect them and fix them in stone, since he had never confided them to anyone? His disciples, who lived in perpetual anxiety, were especially worried, fearing every evening that they would not see their master again the following day. And if Michelangelo were to die, taking with him his secret, the world would lose a sublime work of art. Then Cavalieri, who was no longer either young or handsome but could still influence him as no one else could, and Volterra and Calcagni and his old friend Giannotti, begged him to make a large wooden model of the cupola, finished in every architectural and decorative particular. He made it with their help and presented to the Pope the model

of the great cupola which Michelangelo himself would never see.

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His horizons—which, except for a brief period in his first youth, had never been serene—were darkening once more during the short time that remained to him, and no one was aware how short a time that was. The storm of fire and sword, of foreign and civil wars that had been raging over Italy for sixty years, hastened to its final outburst. After this, peace would reign for two centuries, the squalid peace of a devastated camp, the peace of the graveyard.

The Florentine patriots, with the aid of France, made their last effort for liberation; Siena had rebelled against the Spanish domination; the Strozzi came running, a French fleet appeared between Leghorn and Piombino, but Cosimo I became master of Siena and a Grand Duke. New proscriptions and new decapitations followed.

This was a fatal blow to the patriotic old Florentine. Tortured and bitter, he retreated further into his savage grief. At that time his nephew was celebrating with a great deal of pomp the birth of another baby. His uncle, irritated, wrote: "Such pomp displeases me, for man ought not to laugh when the whole world weeps; and besides, it seems to me that Leonardo is not very judicious, especially in feasting, for one who is born in the manner that should be reserved for the death of one who has lived well."

Then slowly a feeling of fatalism crept into his old heart: the feeling of nonresistance to evil and of good that can be born without human intervention. Already in Giannotti's *Dialogues*, after the fierce apologia for tyrannicide, his thought had turned upon the role of fate in human vicissitudes: "Those who think that only good that springs from evil—that is, from death—can be introduced [into human affairs] appear to me to be dangerous and irresponsible; nor do they think that times change, that new events occur, wills change, men tire, so that often, against all hope and without effort or danger to anyone, a good that others have always desired is born."

He had forgiven Varchi, the rebel, his return to medicine. He despised the Grand Duke as he had despised the Duke; but through the courteous words of homage and reverence of this powerful and arrogant ruler, the hardened old artist, who wanted to reserve his hardness for questions of art only, now heard the voice of the city he loved, and he was touched by that voice. The Academy of Design, which had then been instituted, also called him back to his native city, to elect him president. He would certainly have gone back in the end had not his attachment to St. Peter's and the cupola held him riveted to Rome.

When a new rumor of war reached the gates of Rome, he attempted one more flight. Paul III had gradually drawn away from the Emperor who had made him suffer too many disillusionments and mortifications, and drawn nearer to France; Julius III, who was not very politically minded, had meddled but little in politics. Paul IV was completely taken up by politics and, though Spanish in disposition, loathed the Spaniards. He unleashed France against Philip II, Charles V's successor, and came out the worst in every way. While the papal army was beaten at Paliano by the Duke of Alba's Spaniards, the threat of the fatal days of the sack seemed to be upon Rome once more.

This was Michelangelo's last flight. Having learned his lesson at the time of the s~~age~~, he decided never again to obey man or devil. But the demon of persecution was stronger than his will, and particularly now that, weakened by years, his will had become stubbornness rather than firmness. He fled again. For some time he had vowed to worship at the shrine of Notre Dame of Lourdes. He had always lacked the time and the means before, but now that the Pope was thinking of going to war the work in St. Peter's had slowed down and he could leave. He did not reach even the halfway mark of his pilgrimage but stopped at Spoleto.

He stayed there for several weeks and rested. In their solitude, the monks were happy to welcome the glorious old man as a messenger of God. He led their blissful, pastoral life, free of cares or troublesome thoughts. It was October, the season of morning mists and warm sun-bathed afternoons. When his strength permitted him, he went into the hills. He learned to

know the mournful songs of shepherds, the voices of birds, the murmuring of torrents and of the forest. He meditated, and his spirit soared in its longing toward God. In order to find one single memory in his life that bound him to the present, he had to go back to the other end of the long road over which he had come, to the years in Settignano. The fresh candor of the spirit of St. Francis was revealed to the anxious and worried explorer of the abysses of the Old Testament.

This man, who had always lived among stones and men, hardly knew trees and grass, which he had always looked upon as useless ornaments, and he had never introduced those useless ornaments into his art. He confided to Vasari: "I have come back less than half myself to Rome, because in truth there is no peace except what is found in woods."

CHAPTER XXVII

BUT HE WAS UNABLE to find peace in the woods. His destiny was to live without peace, among stones. And there would be peace only at the end of his long road.

Just as at first he used to work all day long, now he also worked at night, for he no longer slept. Anyone going to visit him at midnight would find him up, wrapped in his cape in wintertime, booted, and on his head a cardboard beret on which he had fixed a candle. He gave himself light in this manner in order to have his hands free to work. He still carved or drew. His sight was no longer good, but his hand was steady. Shortly before he died he made an exquisite drawing of the head and shoulders of a woman. And his memory remained unclouded. He used to say that he remembered every line he had ever drawn, that if by chance he repeated a line once drawn, he erased it.

Old as he was, he had the surgeon Matteo Realdo Colombo, who had become his constant companion, bring him the corpse of a handsome young athlete, which he used to continue his study of anatomy. He was still thinking of writing a treatise on

this subject because Albrecht Dürer's, which dealt only with the position and measurement of muscles, and not with their movement, appeared incomplete to him.

On a summer's day, finding the heat unbearable, he started to draw in a cool room, barefoot on the damp floor. He became absorbed in this work until he was seized with shivers and spasms. In the buildings of St. Peter's he often lingered until the men had stopped working. At their departure, late in the evening, he would run off like a thief into the Belvedere, grope his way through those ancient statues, and, stopping by a favorite statue, fondle the smooth marble with his long hands.

At other times, under the stars, a nocturnal passer-by could see him kneeling in the garden, in an attitude of contemplation and prayer. No street noise could shake him. He had always liked the night better than the day, and darkness more than night. To the night he had written a lovely sonnet: "O night, sweet time, though dark . . ."

One night Vasari, who had just arrived from Florence, knocked at his door. He opened it and stood aside to let him in, but before the inquisitive Vasari could step in, he dropped the candle far from the marble on which he was working. He told Vasari that his life, like that candle, would soon be spent.

He had suckled the instinct for sculpture at the breast of his wet-nurse in Settignano, and death alone would separate him from sculpture. During the day he attended to the great architectural constructions. He was everywhere—in St. Peter's, Porta Pia, on the Campidoglio, at Diocletian's Baths—but at night he returned to his stones. In this way he recaptured a feeling of life. He had had an enormous capital from the Temple of Peace brought to him, and had carved from it a *Pietà*, a *Pietà* different from the first one. In the group were Christ, His Mother, Mary Magdalene, and behind them all a bearded and hooded old man who might well be Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea, but who had Michelangelo's suffering countenance.

He did not want Vasari to see it. He worked at it jealously. Perhaps he was thinking of sculpturing it for his own tomb. He

attacked the marble with all the frenzy of his youth. His weak, thin wrist held the mallet steadily. A young man who saw him at work was awed by the spectacle as by the presence of an eternal force embodied in that tiny man reduced to skin and bones. But a furious blow took off more marble than was necessary, or perhaps the work no longer satisfied him. He showered it with hammer blows until he had smashed an arm and a leg, and then abandoned it. He made a present of it to his servant, Antonio, who had asked him for it; then Calcagni, who thought of finishing it under the master's guidance, acquired it. But not even Tiberio Calcagni was able to finish it. It is now in Florence in Santa Maria del Fiore.

It is Michelangelo's most intimate marble, the one that his sensibility impregnated most deeply. Now that his life was pure, he thought, he could carve the face of Jesus, hoping he would succeed better than Metello Vari had with his Redeemer. In the unfinished group the body and face of Jesus are completely finished, but perhaps he felt that they did not yet correspond to what he had in mind. These are tragedies reserved for great spirits.

He had already started another *Pietà*, and he was to begin yet another one, Palestrina's *Pietà* and the Rondanini *Pietà*. The thought of death was engraved in his heart, and he wanted to engrave it in the face of the divine dead. In the atrium of his house, which looked like a tomb, hung with cobwebs and now darkened by the large trees that grew around it, he had drawn a man holding up a coffin on his back, and under it he had written, in three lines of poetry: "I tell you that you who have given the world body and soul and spirit together—your place is in this dark coffin."

For the last *Pietà* he had only an oblong block, almost a column; it seemed impossible to extract a group of even two from it, and he conceived a group of two that was almost contained in one. It was a completely unexpected *Pietà*, for he always sought the unusual and the difficult. The Mother, standing, clasps to her bosom her Son, who is falling. She holds him up and at the same time supports herself on him.

But he finished neither the one nor the other. "O Lord, grant that I shall always want to do more than I am able." His power diminished as his will increased. The dissatisfaction of the old man was desperate.

Some saw in these *Pietàs* what almost amounted to a renunciation of one of Michelangelo's principles: that painting, in order to be good, must have something of sculpture, and that sculpture which has something of painting is not good sculpture.

Later, others would see in these unfinished marbles the plastic vigor of Michelangelo almost dissolved in color and light.

* * *

Michelangelo's constant companion for fifty years followed him silently; now she spoke to him and he heard her voice.

In order to hear her voice better, he left the noisy workshops for the silences of his house. He wanted to be left alone: "My eyes are saddened by many things, my heart by everything." He wanted to hear that voice only, to listen to it during his long silences and meditations; he finally saw, evoked by that voice, the face of God, which he had imprinted upon marble and walls, but only for others. "The story of the world has taken from me the time allotted for the contemplation of God." And yet no one had contemplated Him as he had.

He called his nephew to Rome to tell him about his will, then immediately dismissed him. The nephew, who was now rich without ever having done anything to acquire riches, who was honored by artists and authorities because of the great name he bore, could not but continue to send him produce from the farms. But Michelangelo was almost unable to enjoy them any longer, for his digestion was weak and the doctor had put him on a diet. He then asked him for a box of secret documents that years ago he had given him to safeguard with every precaution in Florence. Now he wanted to show them to the Pope, as they would do him honor.

He remembered the contract he signed when he was twenty-five years old with Cardinal Piccolomini for fifteen statues to decorate the family tomb in the cathedral of Siena. It

had been one of his first contracts, the beginning of a long road; and then he had become suspect because he had done only four statues. He had been a boy then, in his father's power, and the contract had remained in his father's hands. He wanted his nephew to look for it also and to send it to him so that he might settle the affair with the heirs and so that later his nephew would not unjustly suffer annoyances. One must leave this world with one's affairs in order and one's conscience in peace.

The sums of money that he periodically sent to be spent on charity and on dowries for marriageable girls were now increasing. He ferreted the money out of various hiding places—a copper box, an earthenware vase—concealed in every corner of the house, and he made rolls of gold coins which he then sent to his nephew. At one time alone he sent three hundred crowns.

In the summer of 1562 his nephew had another child, the fourth, whom he wanted to name Buonarotto. He hoped that that one would live. He did live and perpetuated the line of the Buonarotti Simonis.

Leonardo heard rumors that his uncle was being neglected and robbed by his servants, and he wrote to him about it. Perhaps it was true that he was being robbed, but the reports angered his uncle, who retorted that they were the words of the envious and the wicked who, being themselves unable to rob someone, spread lies and calumnies about the faithful people who lived in his house. He wrote his last letter to his nephew on December 28, 1563; then his hand could no longer hold a pen, but he continued to dictate letters to him every week.

Although they knew he wanted to see no one, and were afraid they would find him scowling, nonetheless his last pupils, old now, too, came toward evening to report on the development of the buildings. Cavalieri told him about the Campidoglio; della Porta and Vignola about St. Peter's; Tiberio Calcagni and Daniele da Volterra, and Marcello Venusti, who had asked his permission to paint his portrait, came also, as did Leone Leoni, who had coined a medal of him, on the reverse of which, at Michelangelo's request, a blind man led by a dog had been engraved.

They needed to see him and to listen to his surly but affectionate words. The man who was always irate about all his contemporaries spoke gently to his devoted disciples, to those who were near as well as to those far away, and he wrote to Cellini, Ammanati, and Vasari, even though they did not deserve his kind words.

After having seen him, after having heard his words, his disciples left, taking with them the fear that one day soon they would not find him again. The last spirit that had survived an epoch now dead was slowly dying.

* * *

Michelangelo had entered upon his ninetieth year, and he still felt strong. He continued to ride horseback, which was still his favorite pastime, and sometimes Vasari accompanied him when he came to Rome. One Good Friday, when they were riding together for the visit to the Sepulchers, they met the Pope, who dispensed them from celebrating the rites.

On February 12, 1564, Michelangelo worked until evening at the last *Pietà*; and it seemed as though the white marble had frozen the old unheated house. There had been rain and snow for days. On the following day he was stricken with fever, but he concealed it from his faithful servant Antonio, who watched over him solicitously and who would have kept him in bed had he known. He spent the afternoon rummaging through a stack of old drawings and threw a great many into the fire. At twilight he ordered his horse to be saddled and rode off. He tried to go outside the walls, wanting perhaps to see the Colosseum once more with the young moon shining on it; but he lacked the strength to go that far. He returned shivering, and crouched by the fire unable to bear the thought of going to bed. Tiberio Calcagni—who, warned by the servant, was already in the house—reproved him affectionately. Michelangelo looked at his disciple with unseeing eyes:

“What do you want? I am ill and cannot make myself comfortable.”

He wanted him to summon Daniele da Volterra and spoke words he had never before spoken: he did not wish to be left alone.

Calcagni also summoned the two doctors who were looking after him, and his other pupils. For three days the master stayed by the fire, then spent two in bed. Cavalieri did not leave his side.

Calcagni immediately wrote to Leonardo. The day after, Michelangelo wanted Daniele also to write to him, but only to tell him that he could come to Rome if he wanted to see him, but without haste and carefully, so as not to fall ill and run dangers on the bad roads of that season.

After he was put to bed he dozed off. Through his half-closed eyes he saw the incomplete marble of the *Pietà* gleaming in the shadows of the next room like a ghostly apparition. And behind that marble the distant marble of his first *Pietà*. And even further back, the Madonna of the Stairs, sculptured when he was still a child.

On the last day he summoned his pupils and told them in a few words what his will was. He left his soul to God, his remains to the earth, and his possessions to his family. At the end they heard him murmur in a low voice his desire to return at least after his death to his Florence. He had insisted during the last years that his nephew purchase him a house for himself alone, a beautiful and stately house, but his nephew had not been able to satisfy him; it would now be unnecessary.

Diomede Leoni wrote to Leonardo again to hurry him, but Leonardo did not arrive in time.

Michelangelo Buonarroti died on Friday the 18th of February 1564, at sunset, and the eyes of a man who had seen God closed.

* * *

His remains were carried to the neighboring church of the Holy Apostles, where Solemn Obsequies were celebrated in his honor. Pope Pius thought of erecting a tomb for him in St. Peter's, but Michelangelo's desire to be buried in Florence was

granted. Leonardo succeeded in removing his uncle's remains and sending them in a box to Vasari, as merchandise.

The bier arrived in Florence on March 11th. It was carried from the customs house to the church of San Pier Maggiore, in the chapel of the Assumption, by a cortège of young painters, sculptors, and architects. That same night it was taken from San Pier to Santa Croce, where it was uncovered by Vincenzo Borghini, the President of the Academy, and the young were able to pay their last respects to him. Although an attempt had been made to keep this secret, people rushed from all over the city and crowded into the church. Everyone wanted to see the great man; there were some who remembered having seen him on a day now long ago run under a volley of fire to the besieged walls; there were others who had never seen him.

They looked at him thoughtfully but passively. The Grand Duke may have feared an uprising, but Florence was no longer the city of 1494 or of 1527; the sentiment of freedom was dead. Not many years would pass before an equestrian statue would be erected in the Piazza della Signoria to Cosimo I, labeling him with a long catalogue of titles: great, first, pious, happy, invincible, just, clement. The seventeenth century was beginning.

Four members of the Academy were appointed to arrange the civic ceremonies: two painters, Vasari and Angelo Bronzino; and two sculptors, Cellini and Bartolommeo Ammanati. July the 14th was celebrated with a procession of academic authorities and crowds of people. Benedetto Varchi read the funeral oration. Grand Duke Cosimo was present by proxy. Vasari, recounting to him the events of the glorious day, was anxious to tell him that of the four chosen deputies Benvenuto, "who has given this world enough to talk about," was missing. Benvenuto was ill, or said he was, in order not to have to sit next to Vasari.



FIGHT OF THE LAPITHAE AND CENTAURS. Bas-relief.



THE MADONNA OF THE STAIRS. Bas-relief.



LORENZO THE MAGNIFICENT, WITH TWO MEMBERS OF THE
SASSETTA FAMILY. Detail of the fresco of Ghirlandaio, Santa Trinità,
Florence.



POLIZIANO, WITH THE CHILD JULIANO DE' MEDICI. Detail of the fresco of Ghirlandaio, Santa Trinità, Florence.



THE INTOXICATED BACCHUS.



FIRST PIETÀ. Detail.



ONE OF THE DECORATIVE NUDES. Detail, ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.



PROFILE OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL. Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.



JULIUS II. Detail of the Mass of Bolsena by Raphael.



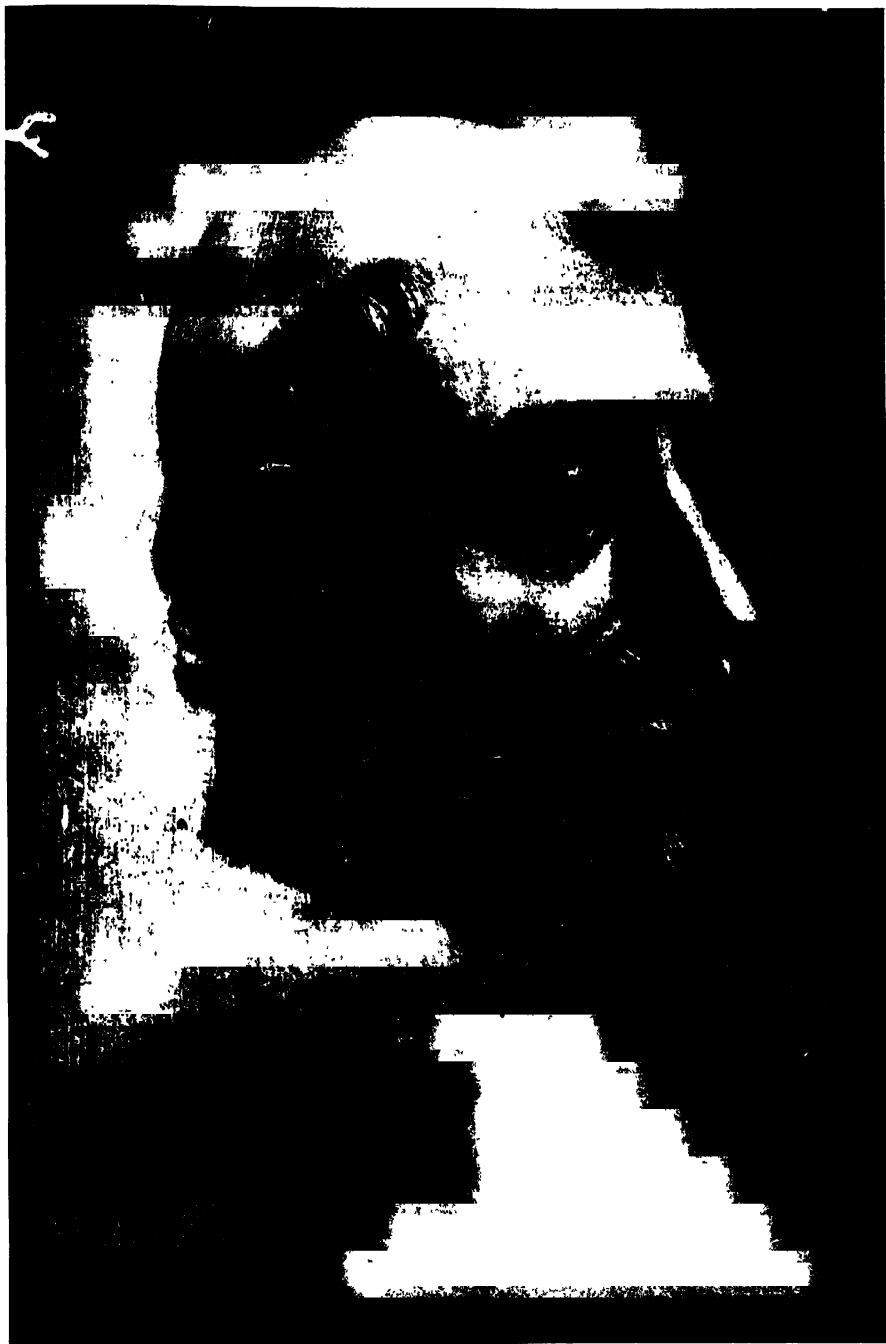
LEO X. By Raphael.



AURORA. Detail.



THE MADONNA OF THE MEDICIS.



CLEMENT VII. By Sebastian del Piombo.



PAUL III. By Titian.



THE MOSES. Detail.



THE SUPREME JUDGE. Detail of *The Last Judgment*.



THE PIETÀ OF THE DUOMO OF FLORENCE.



NICODEMUS. Detail of the Pietà of Florence.



THE LAST PIETA.



CUPOLA OF ST. PETER'S OF ROME.